

**The Promises We Keep:  
President Gerald R. Ford's Leadership at the Helsinki Conference**

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Honors Thesis

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March 31, 2014

## **Introduction:**

### **The Promises We Keep: President Ford's Leadership at the Helsinki Conference**

Gerald R. Ford served in the United States Congress for almost a quarter of a century and his greatest aspiration was to become the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Yet in 1974, he became president of the United States during one of the most challenging times in the nation's history. Domestically, the economy was suffering from rampant inflation and the highest unemployment since the Great Depression. Internationally, U.S. relationships were strained with Cold War rival, the Soviet Union. Public and congressional faith in the executive branch's ability to resolve these challenges had been shattered by the Vietnam War and Watergate crises. Given the magnitude of the nation's problems, coupled with the fact that he would face an election in two short years, President Ford could have understandably focused on a course of action to resolve domestic issues and bolster his own image at home. Instead, he pursued a course of action to resolve international issues and elevate America's image in the world.

Gerald Ford ascended to the presidency with a steadfast belief that America was duty bound to play a prominent global leadership role. In his first foreign policy address to a joint session of Congress he declared, "The leadership of the United States of America, since the end of World War Two, has sustained and advanced the security, well-being, and freedom of millions of human beings besides ourselves."<sup>1</sup> To fulfill America's demanding responsibility, President Ford pursued an ambitious and visible foreign policy. Among his most controversial foreign policy decisions was to attend the 1975 Conference on European Security and Cooperation in Helsinki and sign its Final Act. His decision to attend was met with severe public, congressional, and media opposition who feared the Final Act cemented Soviet hegemony over

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<sup>1</sup> Ford, "Foreign Policy Address," Speech at Joint Session of Congress, Washington, D.C., 10 April 1975, 5.

Eastern Europe. The outcome of the Helsinki Conference remained controversial through the remainder of Ford's presidency. In fact, he did not count the Helsinki accords among his administration's accomplishments in his final State of the Union Address on January 12, 1977. And yet in an interview conducted fifteen years later, Ford cited the Helsinki accords as one of the greatest accomplishments of his presidency.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of my thesis is to explore the leadership characteristics Ford developed in his career, examine his leadership role at the Helsinki Conference on European Security and Cooperation as president, and assess the Final Act's ultimate impact. First, I will argue that Gerald Ford's military and twenty-five year congressional experiences shaped the principles, strengths, and weaknesses with which he led during the Helsinki Conference. Second, I will argue that President Ford played a visible and courageous leadership role under severe domestic opposition during the Helsinki Conference that gave the Final Act international credibility. Finally, I will argue that in the short term, Ford's support of the Helsinki Final Act created ill-will that contributed to his 1976 presidential election loss, but established the foundation of human rights, self-determination, and trade expansion upon which Eastern bloc democratization and German re-unification were built at the close of the Cold War. My thesis is that Gerald Ford established the leadership qualities during his unique experiences in the military and Congress that guided his call for peaceful freedom at the Helsinki Conference and resulted in short term personal political loss, but long term foreign policy success.

Chapter one will analyze five beliefs and strengths Gerald Ford developed during his military and congressional career that were the foundation of his leadership at the Helsinki Conference. First, Ford developed a strong internationalist belief. This was sparked by his World War II military service and further developed in his congressional roles in funding Cold War

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<sup>2</sup> DeFrank, *Write it When I'm Gone*, 101.

initiatives, his co-authorship of the Republican stance on the Vietnam War, and his visit as House Minority Leader to Communist China. Second, Ford developed an ardent belief in peace through strength. This was developed through his roles on the Appropriations Defense Subcommittee as well as personal visits to South East Asia. Third, Ford developed the ability to lead courageously in the face of opposition. This quality was initially forged in his ability to secure a seat on the Appropriations Committee and to successfully challenge for the House Minority Leader role, and was later honed during his vocal opposition to President Johnson's Vietnam War policy. Fourth, Ford developed the skill of collaborative compromise through relationship building. This skill was developed in his work on the Democratic led Intelligence Appropriations Subcommittee, the intense debates in which he engaged as House Minority Leader during the Johnson administration and House Majority Leader during the Nixon administration. Fifth, Ford led with unquestionable integrity. This skill was honed with congressional colleagues in his experiences on several Appropriations Subcommittees, in his determination to reveal the truth about President Johnson's misleading Vietnam War actions, and in the transparency he demonstrated in his vice presidential confirmation hearings.

Despite these experiences, Ford failed to develop the skill of inspirational communication in his congressional career. This began in his years on the highly confidential work on the Appropriations Committee which required no communication and was later revealed in his inability to create the inspirational communication necessary to advance his initiatives as House Minority Leader. Taken together, these five leadership beliefs and strengths, along with his communication shortcoming, defined President Ford's leadership at the Helsinki Conference.

Research to identify the qualities that characterized Ford's leadership at Helsinki included scholarly works supplemented with primary documents. These scholarly works

included Yanek Mieczkowski's *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, James Cannon's *Time and Chance: Gerald Ford's Appointment with History*, Kenneth Thompson's *The Ford Presidency*, John Robert Greene's *The Presidency of Gerald Ford*, Thomas DeFrank's *Write it When I'm Gone*, and Robert Peabody's *Leadership in Congress*. Primary documents included Ford's autobiography, *A Time to Heal*, The Library of Congress's *Analysis of the Philosophy and Voting Record of Representative Gerald R. Ford*, Michael Doyle's *Gerald R. Ford Selected Speeches While in Congress*, The Congressional Quarterly *President Ford: The Man and His Record*, and Ford's newsletters to his Michigan constituents from the Ford Presidential Library.

Chapter Two will examine Ford's leadership at the Helsinki Conference. First, I will define President Ford's Cold War foreign policy and stance on the Helsinki accords in contrast with those of President Nixon. While President Ford was committed to advancing President Nixon's policy of détente, Ford's commitment to peace through strength and human rights resulted in a more forceful freedom and equality stance at Helsinki than the Soviet appeasement stance Nixon would likely have taken. Second, I will articulate the leadership challenges President Ford faced in executing this foreign policy. In the face of a severely struggling American economy and the government mistrust arising from the Vietnam War and Watergate, these challenges included an emerging isolationism, a cynical and critical media, and a power shift from the executive branch to the legislative branch. Fourth, I will discuss President Ford's resolve to attend the Helsinki Conference in the face of serious opposition from vocal American citizens advocating for East European rights, from congressional challengers, and from the media who believed the Helsinki Final Act was meaningless.

Having established this background, I will evaluate President Ford's leadership during the Helsinki Conference on European Security and Cooperation itself. First, I will discuss the

Helsinki accords negotiations overseen by Ford that resulted in collaborative compromises for greater human rights, self-determination, and arms reductions talks from the Soviet Union

Second, I will examine the Helsinki Final Act that President Ford endorsed and signed to illuminate the groundbreaking nature of its self-determination, sovereign equality, and human rights principles.. Third, I will examine the collaborative personal diplomacy President Ford demonstrated in the unprecedented visits he held with Warsaw pact nations, the Soviet Union, and American allies. Fourth, I will examine President Ford’s speech in which he articulated America’s global leadership commitment to peace and urged the thirty-five signatory nations to uphold the promises of freedom and human rights written in the Final Act.

Research to assess President Ford’s Soviet foreign policy and his leadership at the Helsinki Conference focused on primary sources from collections at the Ford Presidential Library. The collection entitled “*Gerald R. Ford, Presidency – Foreign Affairs and National Security*” contained key documents including briefings from Ford’s National Security Council meetings where Soviet relations and the Helsinki Conference were discussed, Ford’s correspondence with foreign leaders, along with Ford’s Foreign Policy and State of the Union speeches to Congress. The newly published collection entitled “*Kissinger Reports on the USSR*” included memoranda of conversations of President Ford’s meetings with foreign leaders before and during the Helsinki Conference. This collection also contained vital State Department Bulletins that included content from the Helsinki Conference’s press releases, speeches, and the content of the Final Act. The collection entitled the “*Ron Nessen Papers*” included press memoranda and releases on Helsinki Conference related foreign policy and political issues. Additionally, I utilized Ford’s own account of the Helsinki Conference in his autobiography and Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin’s account from his book *In Confidence: Moscow’s*

*Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents*. Finally, I used scholarly works on the Ford presidency including John Robert Greene's *The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford*, Yanek Mieczkowski's *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, and scholarly works on the partnership between Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger including Jussi Hanhimäki's *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, and William Burr's *The Kissinger Transcripts*.

Chapter Three will examine the immediate term, short term, and long term impact of Ford's leadership at the Helsinki Conference. First, I will assess President Ford's failure to capitalize on the successful signing of the Helsinki Final Act with an inspirational message that could have secured popular domestic support for this accomplishment and prevented the loss he suffered in approval ratings that immediately followed the conference. Second, I will argue that the Helsinki accords proved to be a short term political liability for President Ford and played a role in his defeat during the 1976 presidential election. In the primary election, Ford faced intense competition from right-wing conservative challenger Ronald Reagan who sharply criticized Ford's decision to sign the Helsinki Final Act as a spineless appeasement to the Soviet Union that subjugated Eastern Europe to Soviet tyranny. In the general election, Ford faced further criticism from Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter. Carter criticized the Helsinki accords as an American endorsement of the Soviet Union's domination over Eastern Europe, and then further criticized Ford for pressing for greater human rights in the Final Act. But it was Ford's own poor performance on a Helsinki question during the foreign policy debate where he unintentionally denied Soviet control over East Europe that proved most costly. While many factors contributed to Ford's election defeat, the Helsinki accords played a critical role.

Finally, I will argue that the Helsinki accords proved to be a long term foreign policy success well beyond President Ford's administration. The widely publicized Helsinki Final Act became the inspiration for dissident movements across Eastern Europe where "Helsinki Groups" formed to demand greater freedoms and rights. In the fifteen years that followed the original signing of the Final Act, the demands of these groups played a contributing role to the collapse of Communism and its replacement with the East European free elections that followed. Furthermore, the Helsinki agreements were expressly invoked by President George H.W. Bush and President Mikhail Gorbachev in the German reunification negotiations that resulted in Germany's right to self-determine the alliance to which it would belong. What began as a bold decision by President Ford to sign a forward looking agreement in the face of personally costly opposition, ultimately contributed to the conclusion of the Cold War.

Research to assess the short and long term outcomes of the Helsinki accords included both primary and secondary sources. From the Ford Presidential Library, I researched the collection entitled "*Selected Documents on the 1976 Presidential Campaign*" that included Ford's campaign strategy, debate briefings and transcripts, and campaign analysis. To understand the impact of the Helsinki Conference on Ford's image, I researched Gallup Poll results of approval ratings over the course of Ford's presidency as well as media coverage of the Helsinki Conference and 1976 election collected by Ford's staff and archived in the Ford Presidential Library. From the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, I researched the collection entitled "*Records on the Fall of the Berlin Wall and German Reunification.*" I also researched scholarly works such as Daniel Thomas's *The Helsinki Effect*, John Gaddis's *The Cold War*, Yanek Mieczkowski's *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, and the PBS Documentary *The Presidents: G.H.W. Bush* to understand the ultimate outcomes of the Helsinki accords.



## **Chapter One:**

### **The Origins of President Gerald R. Ford's Helsinki Leadership**

When he graduated from Yale Law School and opened a law practice in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1941, Gerald Ford was a confirmed isolationist. As a student at Yale he had stated that “the U.S. should avoid entangling alliances abroad.”<sup>3</sup> However, his subsequent World War II naval service in the Pacific Theater, his nearly twenty-five year career in the House of Representatives, and his brief tenure as vice president transformed his views on America’s leadership role in global affairs and enabled him to develop the key strengths that characterized his leadership at the Helsinki Conference. It was during this time that he formed two key foreign policy beliefs. First, he shifted from an isolationist to an internationalist who believed the United States was duty bound to play a leadership role in achieving global peace. Second, he developed a strong belief that this peace was best achieved through America’s military and economic strength. He also developed three important personal strengths that he successfully leveraged in combination to make his leadership successful at the Helsinki Conference. These strengths included courage in the face of opposition, collaboration through relationship building, and unquestionable integrity. This formidable combination of beliefs and strengths developed throughout his career enabled Ford to lead with the conviction necessary for the long term success of the Helsinki accords. However, Ford failed to develop the skill of inspirational communication that would ensure the short term success of his leadership at the Helsinki.

#### ***Internationalism and America's Leadership Responsibility***

Gerald Ford entered the Oval Office in 1974 intent on prioritizing a strong and visible foreign policy. Despite facing the daunting domestic challenges of Watergate, opposition to the

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<sup>3</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 61.

Vietnam War, and an ailing economy, Ford was determined to reestablish America's leadership presence in the world. He had declared in his vice presidential confirmation hearings that, "I consider myself a moderate, certainly on domestic affairs, conservative on fiscal affairs, but a very dyed-in-the-wool internationalist on foreign policy."<sup>4</sup> And in a speech delivered at the University of Jacksonville in 1971 he had stated, "This is the challenge that faces us in foreign affairs – that we continue to assert world leadership in the face of neo-isolationism."<sup>5</sup> Ford's iron-willed dedication to internationalist leadership was sparked during his World War II service and cultivated during a series of unique experiences that spanned his nearly twenty-five year congressional career.

World War II was the catalyst to Ford's career in public service. Ford first learned of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor while listening to the radio on his drive home from a Sunday afternoon in his law office on December 7, 1941. He later wrote, "There was no doubt in my mind that the United States would go to war, that the war would be long and that everything would change very quickly for me."<sup>6</sup> He volunteered for service in the Navy the following day and was sent to the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland.<sup>7</sup> Eager to play an active role in the war Ford said, "I wrote letters to everyone I knew, pleading for a billet on a ship."<sup>8</sup> His efforts were finally rewarded with an assignment aboard the *U.S.S. Monterey*. As a gunnery officer, Ford fought throughout the Pacific from New Guinea to the Gilbert Islands on successful offensive missions including Makin, Kwajalein, and Kaiveng where the crew of the *Monterrey* earned eleven battle stars.<sup>9</sup> He survived numerous Japanese attacks as well as a typhoon that

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<sup>4</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 236.

<sup>5</sup> Qtd., Doyle, *Gerald R. Ford Selected Speeches*, 179.

<sup>6</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 57.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>9</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 35.

nearly swept him overboard.<sup>10</sup> “It was every bit as much action as I had hoped to see,” Ford recalled.<sup>11</sup>

This experience transformed Ford’s principles. His former isolationist stance gave way to an internationalist stance toward American foreign policy. Ford wrote, “My wartime experiences had given me an entirely new perspective. The U.S., I was convinced, could no longer stick its head in the sand like an ostrich.”<sup>12</sup> In an interview with *U.S. News and World Report*, he characterized himself as a “reformed isolationist who, before World War II, was mistaken like a lot of people.”<sup>13</sup> Having won the war, he believed it was imperative for the United States to build and maintain a strong global leadership presence that would deter future aggressors. He revealed, “I returned understanding we could never be isolated again. We were and are one world. It was clear to me, it was inevitable to me, that this country was obligated to lead in this new world”<sup>14</sup> The sense of duty that motivated Ford to enlist in the war effort similarly motivated him to maintain peace. He said, “We had won the war. It was up to us to keep the peace.”<sup>15</sup>

It was on the strength of his internationalist conviction that Ford successfully ran for Congress. Within just one year of his returning from the war, Ford decided to run for the House of Representatives to represent Michigan’s Fifth District. “The war got me interested in the national and international scene in Congress,” Ford said.<sup>16</sup> Even though West Michigan voters typically held quite isolationist views, Ford established internationalism as the key platform of the campaign. He boldly told the voters, “On foreign policy, I am an internationalist. I do not

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<sup>10</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 273.

<sup>11</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 35.

<sup>12</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 61.

<sup>13</sup> Qtd., “President Ford: The Man and his Record,” *Congressional Quarterly*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>16</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 44.

believe America can live any longer in isolation.”<sup>17</sup> And he proudly supported President Truman’s Marshall Plan and the creation of the United Nations.<sup>18</sup> Ford’s opponent for the Republican nomination was incumbent Bartel Jonkman who remained a fervent isolationist. According to Ford, Jonkman “was a senior Republican on the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and was doing everything he could to torpedo constructive foreign aid legislation” and oppose the Marshall Plan.<sup>19</sup> Ford persistently counter argued that these programs were not only “necessary, but morally right.”<sup>20</sup> The voters of Grand Rapids ultimately agreed and Ford defeated Jonkman in the primary by a two to one margin.<sup>21</sup> On November 2, 1947, Gerald Ford won his election to the Eighty-first Congress with a strong 60.5 percent vote.<sup>22</sup>

Once in Congress, Ford continued to develop his internationalist political position. He became a student of President Truman’s post-war international peace initiatives. In keeping with his campaign promises, he supported these initiatives with his votes. In his first year in Congress, Ford voted in support of President Truman’s proposal to create the North Atlantic Treaty Organization for European security.<sup>23</sup> Ford believed “America would need strong allies to resist the growing Communist threat.”<sup>24</sup> When North Korea invaded South Korea, Ford publicly supported President Truman’s decision to deploy American military to defend South Korea.<sup>25</sup>

Ford’s strong internationalist position defined his leadership during his first year in the House of Representatives. His internationalist reputation earned him speaking engagements with organizations such as the Bilderberg Conference, the Interparliamentary Union, and the Council

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<sup>17</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 49.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>19</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 64.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 52.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>24</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 61.

<sup>25</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 56.

on Foreign Relations.<sup>26</sup> And interestingly, Congressman Ford caught the attention of his future Secretary of State, Harvard Professor Henry A. Kissinger, who frequently invited Ford to Cambridge to speak with his foreign policy students. Kissinger valued Ford's national security expertise and the practical approach he took to his work.<sup>27</sup>

Ford's internationalist stance continued to develop beyond post World War II issues into America's subsequent hot and cold conflicts. Ford firmly felt that Communism had become the new threat to global freedom. He stated in a speech at Duke University, "I personally believe that the Communist powers of the world implacably seek the downfall of the Free World nations – chiefly the United States."<sup>28</sup> He declared, "I want a settlement that will discourage further Communist aggression, whether it is in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, the Pacific, or in Europe."<sup>29</sup> Therefore, Ford consistently advocated for strong military action to contain the Communist threat. After reviewing his voting record spanning his career in the House of Representatives, researchers at the Library of Congress concluded, Ford "has supported an active role for the United States abroad, involving close working ties with this country's allies and willingness to confront serious challenges to the nation's security."<sup>30</sup> For example, he called for the bombing of Communist China's supply bases in 1951 during the Korean War.<sup>31</sup> And he vocally criticized the withdrawal of U.S. military support from the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961.<sup>32</sup> Ford also advocated for greater independence of East European nations from the Soviet Union. The Library of Congress researchers concluded that Ford consistently "supported

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<sup>26</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 71.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>28</sup> Qtd., Doyle, *Gerald R. Ford Selected Speeches*, 49.

<sup>29</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>30</sup> "Analysis of the Philosophy and Voting Record of Gerald R. Ford," Library of Congress, 25 October 1973, 96.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 96

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

resolutions protesting the Soviet subjugation of captive nations.”<sup>33</sup> Additionally, Ford strongly supported America’s radio broadcasts to encourage freedom in Eastern European nations. In March 1972, he reported to his Michigan constituents, “For many weeks the House and Senate have fought over whether to continue funding of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. House members--I among them--strongly believe that the radios should continue to operate, since this is the only way to get the truth through the Iron Curtain.”<sup>34</sup> By October 1973, he proudly reported, “Convinced that efforts to bring the truth to the people of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc nations should continue, the House voted 313 to 90 last Tuesday to authorize the funding of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty in fiscal 1974. I strongly supported this action.”<sup>35</sup>

Ford reserved perhaps his strongest internationalist rhetoric for the Vietnam War. Ford’s convictions led him to craft the 1965 statement upon which the Republican policy in Vietnam was based. In a fervent speech on the floor of the House of Representatives Ford outlined his stance for American leadership to bring the Vietnam War to a successful close to contain Communism. “Our purpose,” he said, “is to repel Communist aggression, to minimize American and Vietnamese casualties, and to bring about a swift and secure peace.”<sup>36</sup> To accomplish that purpose, he called for “maximum use of American conventional air and sea power against significant military targets” and “a Kennedy style sea quarantine on North Vietnam.”<sup>37</sup> He accused President Johnson of playing a timid leadership role in this conflict by withholding the full strength of the American military. Following President Johnson’s decision to deploy only more ground troops rather than air strikes, Ford stated, “under the policies which the president has just pledged to continue substantially unchanged . . . our purpose of securing a swift peace

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<sup>33</sup> “Analysis of the Philosophy and Voting Record of Gerald R. Ford,” Library of Congress, 25 October 1973, 76.

<sup>34</sup> Ford, *Washington Review: A Report from Your Congressman*, 27 March 1972.

<sup>35</sup> Ford, *Washington Review: A Report from Your Congressman*, 8 October 1973.

<sup>36</sup> Qtd., Doyle, *Gerald R. Ford Selected Speeches*, 209.

<sup>37</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 209.

has failed, because it was never tried. And our purpose of repelling Communist aggression remains, at best, a dubious stalemate and deadly dual of attrition.”<sup>38</sup> Ford had put the internationalist leadership position he had formed during World War II into purposeful and vocal action recommendations during the Vietnam War.

A final experience that defined Congressman Ford’s internationalist leadership position was his visit to China. Just four months after Nixon made his historic visit that opened U.S. relations with China in 1972, House Minority Leader Ford and House Majority Leader Hale Boggs were invited to visit China to discuss cultural exchanges, trade, and international security issues.<sup>39</sup> After extensive briefings from U.S. diplomats, Ford toured museums, a visited a Jeep plant, and saw a demonstration of surgery using acupuncture rather than anesthetic.<sup>40</sup> But it was his face to face meeting with Chinese Premier Chou En-lai that indelibly shaped his internationalist perspective.

In a private meeting with Ford and Boggs, Chinese Premier Chou En-lai delivered a firm call for United States leadership against the Soviet Union. First, Chou En-lai blamed a lack of American leadership for the conflicts in Vietnam and Korea.<sup>41</sup> Second, he persistently cited the Soviet Union’s expanding military as a global threat to peace.<sup>42</sup> Finally, and most importantly, he expressed grave concern over America’s weakening military position. He stated his opposition to George McGovern’s plan to cut U.S. defense spending by \$30 billion and asked why the U.S. was not strengthening NATO.<sup>43</sup> Chou En-lai emphatically stated, “We don’t believe you can reduce your military spending” and asked, “With the Soviet Union increasing its own defenses,

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<sup>38</sup> Qtd., Doyle, *Gerald R. Ford Selected Speeches*, 210.

<sup>39</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 121.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>42</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 98.

<sup>43</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 122.

how can you reduce yours?”<sup>44</sup> When Majority Leader Boggs asked if Chou En-lai believed the Soviet Union would reduce its defense budget, Chou En-lai responded, “Never, never, never!”<sup>45</sup> This was a formative moment that unforgettably impacted Ford’s beliefs. His convictions that the world needed the United States to play an important leadership role in maintaining peace and protecting freedom from Communist aggression in Asia were confirmed and emboldened by his encounter with Chinese Premier Chou En-lai.

Ford remained an ardent internationalist throughout his political career. During the heart of the Vietnam War, Congressman Ford addressed the 1968 graduating class of William and Mary and said, “The year I graduated from the University of Michigan was the year Adolf Hitler seized all power in Germany.”<sup>46</sup> He went on to say that “My generation didn’t like the prospect of war any more than yours. But the nation met that challenge successfully because America’s moral commitment to the cause of human decency was clear. We fought that war for you – even though you didn’t exist yet.”<sup>47</sup> This deeply held internationalist belief in America’s global leadership responsibility was initiated during Ford’s military service, honed during his post-World War II and Vietnam congressional experiences, and cemented by the chilling statements of Premier Chou En-lai in China. And it became the foundation for Ford’s further belief that America must lead global peace from a position of military strength.

### ***Peace Through Strength***

Ford’s firm conviction that America was duty bound to play a leadership role in global peace was matched by his conviction that this global peace could be achieved through America’s strength. In 1970 Congressman Ford stated, the “greatest single American national interest is the

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<sup>44</sup> Qtd., Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 98.

<sup>45</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>46</sup> Qtd., Doyle, *Gerald R. Ford Selected Speeches*, 64.

<sup>47</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 64.



avoidance of a Third World War” and this can be accomplished through “the recognition by the world at large of the fact that the United States will use its power to deter aggression.”<sup>48</sup> By the time he assumed the vice presidency, Ford continued to declare, “Strength brings peace” and therefore it is necessary that we maintain our military strength “so that others know America is strong not only in capability but in will.”<sup>49</sup> This belief was developed through the highly educational and formative series of international experiences Ford sought throughout his career in the House of Representatives. These experiences included an active position on the Appropriations Defense Sub-Committee, remarkable trips throughout Southeast Asia where Ford experienced the Communist threat first hand, a position on the highly secretive Intelligence Sub-Committee on Appropriations, and the aggressive role he assumed as House Minority Leader evaluating and attacking President Johnson’s Vietnam War policy. The often secretive nature of these experiences resulted in criticism that President Ford had little international experience and was ill-prepared for foreign policy leadership. Ford confidently responded to his critics arguing, “Most of the people who say that don’t know the opportunities I had in the Congress to be fully exposed to international matters.”<sup>50</sup> Despite their lack of public exposure, these experiences provided Ford with an unusually strong education in international affairs from which he concluded America could maintain global peace through its strength. At Helsinki, he would artfully leverage America’s military and economic strength to advance peace.

The first experience that forged Ford’s belief in peace through strength was his position on the House Appropriations Committee. During Ford’s second term in Congress, he befriended the Chair of the Appropriations Committee, Representative John Tabor from New York. Tabor

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<sup>48</sup> Qtd., “Analysis of the Philosophy and Voting Record of Gerald R. Ford,” Library of Congress, 25 October 1973, 85.

<sup>49</sup> Qtd., “Gerald Ford: The Man and His Record,” *Congressional Quarterly*, 70-71.

<sup>50</sup> Qtd., DeFrank, *Write it When I’m Gone*, 12.

appointed Ford onto the House Appropriations Committee.<sup>51</sup> This appointment spanned twelve years during which Ford developed special expertise in the spending that underpinned America's foreign policy. During that time Ford served as Chairman of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee and served as a member of both the Foreign Aid and Intelligence Subcommittees.<sup>52</sup> As a member of these subcommittees Ford became an expert on the details of defense and foreign aid budgets. Ford routinely questioned "the secretaries of Defense, State, Army, Navy, Air force, and the heads of the Joint Chiefs of Staff" to defend their budget expenditures.<sup>53</sup> Through these interviews and careful analysis on weapons projects that were brought before the committee, Ford claimed that "The eleven of us on the subcommittee knew more about the military and its programs than most admirals and generals."<sup>54</sup>

In this role Ford supported the substantial defense expenditures he believed would secure peace. He voted to bolster America's military leadership with the H-bomb and the nuclear submarine, the *Nautilus*.<sup>55</sup> He was one of only 11 Republican House members to vote with 120 Democrats to against an amendment that would cap military spending to \$46 billion in 1953.<sup>56</sup> Later he supported new Cold War efforts when President Truman and General Eisenhower's requested sixty million dollars to support the French against Communist aggression in Vietnam.<sup>57</sup> Congressman Ford vocally reported his emerging peace through strength stance to his constituents in his weekly newsletter. In 1951, he expressed his support for cutting aid that indirectly fuelled Communism when he proudly reported, "The Congress recently voted to prohibit further American aid to other nations which continued to trade with Russia and her

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<sup>51</sup> Thompson, *The Ford Presidency: Twenty-Two Intimate Perspectives of Gerald R. Ford*, 162.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>53</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 61-62.

<sup>54</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 61-62.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>56</sup> "Analysis of the Philosophy and Voting Record of Gerald R. Ford," Library of Congress, 25 October 1973, 99.

<sup>57</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 63.

satellites. In other words, the House and Senate felt it wasn't good sense to help a nation with American dollars or materials if that nation continued to trade with the enemy."<sup>58</sup> Similarly, he reported General Eisenhower's position that "we cannot afford to let the 200 million people of Europe . . . be dominated by Red Russia" and by providing military support "the threat of a Communist attack on Europe and America would be stalled or stopped."<sup>59</sup> The *Congressional Quarterly* declared, "As a House member, Ford had built a solid reputation as a believer in a strong military and as a consistent opponent of defense cutbacks."<sup>60</sup>

Armed with the detailed knowledge of the defense and foreign aid budgets, Ford travelled overseas to personally evaluate the impact of America's foreign policy spending. While Ford's belief in peace through strength was sparked by his arduous budget work on the Defense Subcommittee, it fully ignited during his international travels. In 1953, Ford traveled to South East Asia with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles.<sup>61</sup> In Korea Ford toured the front lines, witnessed the return of American prisoners of war and visited a South Korean training facility.<sup>62</sup> From that experience, Ford concluded that South Korea would have the "finest army in the world" but would be unsuccessful without "money to fight with or without aid."<sup>63</sup> After Korea, Ford traveled to Saigon to inspect French troops and supply operations from the aid package he had supported. He personally interviewed military commanders and soldiers. From that experience Ford concluded that, "The French had neither a plan for popular government in Vietnam nor any practical strategy for winning a war against the Communists."<sup>64</sup> Ford then traveled to Taiwan to meet with General Chaing Kai-Shek where he concluded that the Chinese Nationalists were too

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<sup>58</sup> Ford, *Washington Review: A Report from Your Congressman*, 21 June 1951.

<sup>59</sup> Ford, *Washington Review: A Report from Your Congressman*, 8 February 1951.

<sup>60</sup> "Gerald Ford: The Man and his Record," *Congressional Quarterly*, 8.

<sup>61</sup> DeFrank, *Write it When I'm Gone*, 184.

<sup>62</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 63.

<sup>63</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>64</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 63.

weak to retake the mainland.<sup>65</sup> In light of the collective weaknesses Ford witnessed, he became convinced that the United States must use its military strength to assist the democratic governments and prevent Communist encroachment in South East Asia.

Ford's belief in peace through strength was further galvanized when he was appointed to the Intelligence Subcommittee of Appropriations in 1956. In his position on the committee Ford listened to hearings on the top secret CIA budget where he said, "No transcripts were made, None."<sup>66</sup> Despite the fact that he was a Republican, he was appointed to the committee because the Democrats in power trusted him based on the bi-partisan defense decisions he made in his Appropriations Committee work. During Ford's tenure on the Intelligence Subcommittee, America's covert Cold War initiatives escalated substantially. The CIA sent military support to the Hungarian Revolution and deposed Communist leaning leaders in the Congo, Algeria, Turkey, and Guatemala.<sup>67</sup> It invested in the creation of sophisticated satellite spy equipment, missiles, and bombers.<sup>68</sup> Ford found himself in a position of tremendous influence on this committee when the Cold War accelerated. As his influence increased, so did his belief in peace through America's overt and covert military strength.

Although he was bound to secrecy in his work overseeing the CIA budget, he boldly publicized his advocacy of peace through strength through his hawkish stance on the Vietnam War. In a speech addressing the National Press Club on July 21, 1965, Ford outlined his fully developed belief in peace through strength. He started by declaring that if America was to succeed in the hot war in Vietnam, it must "face up to the true nature of the enemy –

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<sup>65</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 63.

<sup>66</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

Communism.”<sup>69</sup> Ford declared that “we are advised by so-called experts that the Soviet Union wants peaceful coexistence” and that “we should encourage such change by a more tolerant attitude toward Communism.”<sup>70</sup> Then he warned, “This has been a theme based on hope, not evidence.”<sup>71</sup> The reality, he said, is that “In Eastern Europe tens of millions of people live under Communist repression” where “the principle of national self-determination is ruthlessly denied.”<sup>72</sup> He cited “the reality of the Cuban missile crisis” where “Communist deceit and aggression were made plain for all to see.”<sup>73</sup> Having established this historical blind spot, he declared “Our lesson in Cuba ought to guide us [in] Vietnam.”<sup>74</sup> He insisted that “Our power is known to the enemy. The enemy must be convinced of the fact that we will use that power to meet the threat of aggression” in Vietnam.<sup>75</sup> He concluded that “We will win our peace by resistance to evil. We will not buy it by compromise with evil.”<sup>76</sup>

Ford’s peace through strength belief was grounded in the intimate knowledge of the defense and foreign aid budgets developed through his arduous work on the Appropriations Defense Subcommittee, reinforced when he witnessed the impact of those decisions in his trips to South East Asia and Eastern Europe, solidified in his work on the Intelligence Subcommittee on Appropriations, and vocalized in his hawkish stance on the Vietnam War. As he approached the end of his congressional career, Ford argued that the United States had achieved success in foreign affairs because it never ceased showing the world that the United States would do whatever necessary to demonstrate its commitment to its responsibilities.<sup>77</sup> With peace through

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<sup>69</sup> Qtd., Doyle, *Gerald R. Ford Selected Speeches*, 196.

<sup>70</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>71</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>72</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>73</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>74</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>75</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>76</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

strength Ford said, “What we are telling the Soviet Union and the world is that we will not allow the other super-power to gain any advantages and we will continue to lead the world toward peace.”<sup>78</sup>

### ***Courage in the Face of Opposition***

Beyond his important foundational beliefs in America’s internationalist leadership responsibility and peace through strength, Ford developed three important strengths during his congressional and vice presidential experiences that defined his leadership at the Helsinki Conference. The first of these was courage in the face of opposition. The moment he entered Congress, he decided he would be an independent decision maker. In fact, on his first congressional bill, he intentionally voted against Republican House Leader Joe Martin and Whip Charles Halleck who were advancing a bill to reduce the power of the House Rules Committee.<sup>79</sup> Throughout his congressional career, Ford continued to develop his ability to navigate difficult opposition.

Ford’s first major demonstration of courage in the face of opposition came during his appointment to the House Appropriations Committee. According to Ford, “Representative Albert Engel decided to leave the Congress to run for governor of Michigan” in 1950.<sup>80</sup> Ford was then serving on the Public Works Committee and asked his friend John Taber for the appointment to Engel’s position on the Appropriations Committee. Taber replied, “Jerry, if the Michigan delegation will vote for you, I want you on the committee.”<sup>81</sup> However, Ford was embroiled in a debate with his Michigan peers as he opposed a public works project that they wanted.<sup>82</sup> Ford discussed the dilemma with his wife Betty who reminded him, “You’ve always said you’ve got

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<sup>78</sup> Qtd., Doyle, *Gerald R. Ford Selected Speeches*, 179.

<sup>79</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 54.

<sup>80</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 68.

<sup>81</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 58.

<sup>82</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 59.

to vote for what you think is right, and if that means you have to sacrifice getting on the Appropriations Committee, that's too bad.<sup>83</sup> “Ford boldly maintained his opposition to the public works project, but convinced the Michigan Republicans to support his appointment. In the face of this opposition, Ford stood his ground and was given his seat on the Appropriations Committee. In recognition of his courageous leadership in his first years in Congress, the U.S. Junior Chamber of Commerce named him one of the ten outstanding young men of the year for his “vigorous and hard-hitting reform movement against well-entrenched county and state political machines.”<sup>84</sup>

Ford took an even more courageous stance to win the role of House Minority Leader. The landslide defeat of Barry Goldwater by Lyndon Johnson in the presidential election, combined with the loss of thirty-eight seats in the House prompted Ford and a group of Republican representatives called the Young Turks to overthrow Republican Leadership in the House.<sup>85</sup> This group selected Ford as their challenger and in December, 1964, he announced his intention to challenge thirty year House veteran, Charles Halleck, for his Minority Leader position.<sup>86</sup> Ford was concerned with Halleck's approach of simply saying ‘no’ to Democratic proposals and declared his approach “an abdication of responsibility.”<sup>87</sup> He therefore feistily claimed he was running to lead a “fighting, forward-looking party seeking responsible and constructive solutions to national problems.”<sup>88</sup> After an “open fight,” Ford won the challenge in a close 73 to 67 secret ballot vote.<sup>89</sup> For the next nine years, Ford would use his position as House Minority Leader as a courageous opponent of President Johnson and his handling of the Vietnam War.

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<sup>83</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 58.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>85</sup> Greene, *The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford*, 5.

<sup>86</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 83.

<sup>87</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 79.

<sup>88</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 83.

<sup>89</sup> Lankevich, *Gerald R. Ford 1913-*, 5.

Given his ardent internationalist belief in America's global leadership role, coupled with his belief in peace through strength, Ford strongly opposed what he believed was President Johnson's doomed strategy for the Vietnam War. Ford believed the United States should utilize its military strength to win the war. Shortly after becoming Minority Leader, Ford met with Johnson and courageously told him, "We went into Vietnam to win, and militarily we must do what we have to do to win."<sup>90</sup> In another meeting, Ford told President Johnson to "use our full non-nuclear capability to bomb Hanoi."<sup>91</sup> Ford further informed Johnson that the United States was signaling a lack of commitment to our opponents saying, "I think the presence of U.S. dependents indicates to the enemy that we don't take this conflict seriously. I strongly urge you to take the dependents out. I believe you should move forward with a military plan and win the war."<sup>92</sup> Ford also aired his criticisms publicly on national television in his weekly show with Senate Minority Leader, Everett Dirksen.<sup>93</sup>

Ford's direct and candid criticism of the Vietnam War policy infuriated President Johnson. Johnson responded by calling Ford "dumb" and famously joking that "Jerry played football too many times without a helmet."<sup>94</sup> Then in a cruel act of vengeance, Johnson falsely told press reporters that Ford had leaked a fabricated report regarding Johnson's refusal to send military reserves into Vietnam and stated that "the Leader's carelessness was endangering the lives of our troops in Vietnam."<sup>95</sup> This false accusation was refuted by Newsweek reporter Sam Shaffer who had attended Ford's press conference and published a letter defending Ford by

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<sup>90</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 87.

<sup>91</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>92</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 87-88.

<sup>93</sup> Greene, *The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford*, 5-6.

<sup>94</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>95</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 87.



saying the subject of Vietnam was not discussed.<sup>96</sup> Despite wide-spread encouragement from his friends to take revenge, Ford did not retaliate.

Even in the face of Johnson's vengeful personal attacks, Ford continued to criticize the president's Vietnam War strategy and encourage a more aggressive military plan to win the conflict. In his memorable 1967 address to the House of Representatives, he boldly challenged Johnson's leadership and stated, "I do not believe the grave challenges we face at home can be countered simply by pouring out more and more money, neither do I believe the grave challenge in Southeast Asia can be met merely by pouring in more and more blood."<sup>97</sup> He implored, "Mr. Speaker, we must ask another question: *Why are we pulling our best punches in Vietnam?* Is there no end, no other answer than more men, more men, more men?"<sup>98</sup> In place of this doomed approach, Ford advocated for "using America's awesome arsenal of conventional arms to compel a swift and sure peace" and to apply "concerted military pressure that could force the enemy to the negotiating table."<sup>99</sup>

Ford's record of courage in the face of opposition was recognized with the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award in 2001. Upon receiving this honor, Ford said "The greatest defeat of all would be to live without courage, for that would hardly be living at all."<sup>100</sup> This type of victorious courage began in Ford's first congressional vote, continued in his appointment to the House Appropriations Committee and his challenge for House Minority Leader, and culminated in his vocal and persistent challenge for a new strategy to win the Vietnam War. Ford's courage was perhaps possible because he was, at the same time, a collaborative relationship builder.

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<sup>96</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 79.

<sup>97</sup> Qtd., Doyle, *Gerald R. Ford, Selected Speeches*, 206.

<sup>98</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>99</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 210 and 216.

<sup>100</sup> Ford, "Remarks by President Ford Upon Receiving the Profile in Courage Award," Speech, 21 May 2001.

### ***Collaboration through Relationship Building***

Ford was a remarkable relationship builder and collaborator. Reflecting on the many roles he held across his career, he noted, “I have always been able to develop allegiances with good people, I don’t know how to define it, or why I have it, but I have a capability of getting people to like to work with me.”<sup>101</sup> While his naturally affable personality played an important role in this leadership strength, Ford worked hard to develop this skill as he worked with his constituents back in Michigan’s Fifth District, his bi-partisan work on the Intelligence sub-committee of the House Appropriations Committee, and his congressional partners as House Minority Leader under both Democratic and Republican presidential administrations. Given he led from a Republican minority position in the House of Representative through most of his career, collaborative relationship building was essential for success. As he entered Congress in 1948 Ford said he quickly learned that, “You had to make allegiances to get something done.”<sup>102</sup>

Perhaps the most important collaborative relationships were with his constituents. Despite intense travel and committee obligations, Ford prioritized frequent two-way communication with the people from Michigan’s Fifth District. Throughout his congressional career, he traveled to Michigan every couple of weeks to connect in person. He read and answered their letters, he listened to their ideas and concerns, and he communicated to them with regular press releases documenting his work. In his March 1951 newsletter, the *Washington Review*, he informed his constituents that he received 1,500 letters in the month of January and he assured them that “all get my personal attention.”<sup>103</sup> And in his March 15, 1951 newsletter he informed his constituents that 50 percent of the letters he receives “demand the president and

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<sup>101</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 41.

<sup>102</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>103</sup> Ford, *Washington Review: A Report from Your Congressman*, 15 March 1951.

Congress slash federal spending” and said “I would like your reaction to this vital problem.”<sup>104</sup>

The newsletter provided a questionnaire for constituents to indicate in which areas they favored spending cuts and invited them to send their responses to his office in Washington.<sup>105</sup> Ford believed that “you can gain a lot from reading and thinking, but you’re more likely to acquire a sense of the mood of the country by meeting with people.”<sup>106</sup>

Congressman Ford worked hard to foster these relationships even when his constituents disagreed with his opinions. For example, he publicly supported the nomination of General Eisenhower rather than Republican establishment candidate Senator Robert Taft in 1951. This concerned many of Ford’s Republican constituents and he received numerous letters along with threats to run a more conservative candidate against Ford in the next election.<sup>107</sup> But Ford invested the time necessary to build relationships with these concerned constituents and shared the rationale for his stand. He recalled, “I knew I had to listen, and it took a lot of explaining to people back in the district.”<sup>108</sup> This investment paid off over the course of his career. In fact, “his empathy with constituents, and their belief in his integrity, had made Jerry Ford the best known citizen of Western Michigan.”<sup>109</sup> The relationships he built with his constituents were rewarded with thirteen election victories over twenty-five years and as Ford recalled, “every time I ran for reelection, the percentage of my winning margin was larger than my first race.”<sup>110</sup>

Ford was equally dedicated to collaborative relationship building with his congressional partners of both parties. In his early years in Congress, he built a reputation for working effectively across partisan boundaries. Ford learned that even political adversaries could find

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<sup>104</sup> Ford, *Washington Review: A Report from Your Congressman*, 15 March 1951.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Qtd., Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 41.

<sup>107</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 61.

<sup>108</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>110</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 71.

common ground on which to collaborate. He once explained his collaborative philosophy by drawing overlapping circles and saying, “If these circles intersect each other, then work with them on that one, and you can get something done in there.”<sup>111</sup> Alabama Democrat Carl Elliott joined the House of Representatives in 1949 and characterized Ford as being “a likable fellow” who would ask his colleagues questions until he understood their issues and “was impressed by his diligence and inquiring mind.”<sup>112</sup> Michigan Republican Senator Robert P. Griffin who served with Ford in the 1960s said Ford, had the “ability to get along with people” and “he always got along well with people of both political parties.”<sup>113</sup>

This early bi-partisan collaboration was especially evident in Ford’s work on the Defense Appropriations Committee. West Texas Democrat George Mahon was Ford’s leader on this committee and complimented his collaborative bi-partisan approach saying, “Regardless of the administration in power, he works toward the accomplishment of the attainable. He is a man you can work with.”<sup>114</sup> Ford further developed his collaboration through relationship skills when he became House Minority Leader. Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen and former House Minority Leader Charles Halleck were close colleagues. Ford wanted to build a close relationship with Dirksen but was concerned with how Dirksen would treat him having challenged Halleck for the role. To build an effective relationship, Ford said, “I decided I would defer to him, seek his help, ask his advice, ask for his help.”<sup>115</sup> This approach forged a strong partnership and the two collaborated to advance Republican alternatives to President Johnson’s Great Society policies. Ford believed the problems of poverty and racial discrimination were important. However, he did not believe they could be solved along with the Vietnam War. Ford

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<sup>111</sup> Qtd., Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 90.

<sup>112</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 70.

<sup>113</sup> Qtd., Thompson, *The Ford Presidency: Twenty-Two Intimate Perspectives of Gerald R. Ford*, 25.

<sup>114</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 64.

<sup>115</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 86.

said, “I didn’t believe that the nation could afford both guns and butter.”<sup>116</sup> To identify solutions, Minority Leader Ford created a committee to identify more efficient and affordable alternatives to Johnson’s Great Society legislation.<sup>117</sup> Ford said that “in almost every case, we came up with better, less costly, more practical ideas than the administration proposed.”<sup>118</sup> For example, this team generated proposals for incentives to engage the private sector in the war on poverty, economic growth plans through federal revenue sharing, and the expansion of voting rights protection to all states.<sup>119</sup>

Ford first had to unify his fellow Republicans behind these proposals. Conservative Republicans wanted stronger opposition to Johnson’s proposals; more liberal Republicans wanted to accept Johnson’s budget increases.<sup>120</sup> By modeling and encouraging compromise, he successfully navigated opposition from the Republican conservative and liberal extremes to generate unity.<sup>121</sup> Ford’s law partner and friend Philip Buchen noted as Minority Leader, Ford “had to keep a rather disparate set of Republicans together” and to develop positions that the minority party was able to support together, Ford “had to accommodate conflicting interests and he had to compromise.”<sup>122</sup> Then in House debates with Democrats on these issues, Ford “could be vigorously partisan.”<sup>123</sup> However, he conscientiously sought good working relationships and “at the end he would make a point of shaking hands and enjoying a laugh with his Democratic

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<sup>116</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 80.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-81.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>122</sup> Qtd., Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 89-90.

<sup>123</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 70.

adversary.”<sup>124</sup> Ford described his conciliatory approach saying, “You have to give a little to get what you really want, but you don’t have to give up your principles.”<sup>125</sup>

Ford continued to build his collaboration through relationship building competence as Minority Leader when Republican Richard Nixon was elected president in 1968. As Minority Leader during the Johnson administration, Ford’s role had been to generate and promote Republican alternatives to Johnson’s programs. Now he said, “My job was to push Nixon’s programs through the House.”<sup>126</sup> Since Nixon did not cultivate a strong relationship with Congress and instead chose to focus on foreign policy, the difficult work of generating congressional support to the president’s proposals fell to Ford.

Nixon’s Federal Revenue Sharing proposal proved to be Minority Leader Ford’s greatest success in collaborative relationship building during the Nixon administration. Federal Revenue sharing had been proposed several times during the 1960s. However, most members of Congress wanted to remain in control of Federal funds and opposed sending it to local governments.<sup>127</sup> For a year and a half, Ford built a broad and strong coalition of Republican and Democratic House members as well as local governors, mayors and county employees to support the president’s plan.<sup>128</sup> In his newsletter to his Michigan constituents, Ford proudly wrote, the House is “scheduled to take up Wednesday a bill providing \$30 billion over five years for Sharing of Federal revenue with States and local units of government. Funds to be shared the first year total 5.3 billion. I strongly support this bill.”<sup>129</sup> In June 1972, this coalition succeeded in passing the Federal Revenue Sharing legislation in the House of Representatives.<sup>130</sup> In fact, during his time

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<sup>124</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 70.

<sup>125</sup> Qtd., Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 10.

<sup>126</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 98.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>129</sup> Ford, *Washington Review: A Report from Your Congressman*, 12 June 1951.

<sup>130</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 104.

as Minority Leader between 1965 and 1974, Ford's effective collaboration resulted in his delivering 85 per cent to 95 per cent of the Republican vote."<sup>131</sup>

When Ford became president, Republican Representative Melvin Laird reflected that President "Ford was more willing to compromise with Congress than any recent president" because he was used to operating in the minority and "he had perfected the art of compromise during his congressional career."<sup>132</sup> Despite the magnitude of the challenges he faced as president and as a congressman, Ford "was respected and beloved by colleagues in the Congress."<sup>133</sup> The respect he garnered for his willingness to forge collaborative relationships was matched only by his unquestionable integrity.

### ***Unquestionable Integrity***

Ford believed that integrity was a leader's foundation. In a speech delivered at the University of Michigan in 1967 he articulated his belief that, "The American people are constantly engaged in a search for truth – for political truth, for moral truth, truth in government, for verities in our international relations."<sup>134</sup> He aspired to deliver that truth throughout his career. So when at his first presidential press conference Ford was asked if he would establish a set of ethical guidelines to prevent another Watergate scandal, he could confidently respond, "The code of ethics will be the example I set."<sup>135</sup> Ford's Chief of Staff, Richard Cheney confirmed that Ford carried through on this definitive declaration stating, "by virtue of who he was, the way he carried himself and the way he operated, he was able to restore the integrity of the presidency."<sup>136</sup> Ford had built his reputation for integrity in his interaction with his

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<sup>131</sup> Lankevich, *Gerald R. Ford 1913-*, 5.

<sup>132</sup> Qtd., Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 89.

<sup>133</sup> Thompson, *The Ford Presidency: Twenty-Two Intimate Perspectives of Gerald R. Ford*, xi.

<sup>134</sup> Qtd., Doyle, *Gerald R. Ford Selected Speeches*, 34.

<sup>135</sup> Qtd., DeFrank, *Write it When I'm Gone*, 273.

<sup>136</sup> Qtd., Thompson, *The Ford Presidency: Twenty-Two Intimate Perspectives of Gerald R. Ford*, 74.

congressional colleagues, the public, and the press over the course of his congressional career. But the full extent of his integrity was revealed during his vice presidential confirmation hearings and his handling of the Watergate scandal as vice president. And this career long commitment to integrity would authentically fuel the integrity that he demanded and endorsed at the Helsinki Conference.

First, Ford demonstrated his unquestionable integrity with his congressional colleagues. In his early work on the Appropriations Committee, he earned a reputation as a leader who kept his word.<sup>137</sup> According to Ford's Press Secretary, "Mr. Ford was well respected as a man whose word was his bond" among the members of Congress with whom he had worked on the Intelligence Committee and the Appropriations Committee.<sup>138</sup> It was his integrity that motivated his Republican counterparts to support his challenge for House Minority Leader. As Michigan Senator Robert Griffin recalled, "I felt Ford had a better chance of winning" because "Jerry Ford didn't seem to have any enemies. Everybody liked him; he was a good guy."<sup>139</sup> As a visual expression of his integrity, Ford refused to put his wife on the congressional payroll as compensation for her work with constituents. Despite the fact that other congressmen were doing so, Ford agreed with his staff assistant's assessment that, "it's contrary to your whole philosophy of public service."<sup>140</sup>

Second, Ford illustrated his unquestionable integrity in his interactions with the public. His newsletters to constituents frequently delivered candid, honest appraisals of the issues he faced in Washington. For example, after Congress had passed a law forbidding foreign aid to nations who traded with Russia, Ford candidly proclaimed in his June 1951 newsletter that

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<sup>137</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 59.

<sup>138</sup> Qtd., Thompson, *The Ford Presidency: Twenty-Two Intimate Perspectives of Gerald R. Ford*, 212.

<sup>139</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>140</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 70.



President Truman had “clearly circumvented the will of the Congress and the American people” when he granted aid to such nations.<sup>141</sup> However, it was his vocal stance rebuking President Johnson’s Vietnam mistruths that most vividly demonstrated his integrity with the public. In his “Why are We Pulling our Best Punches in Vietnam?” speech, Ford declared, “I believe it is high time the American people knew the truth.”<sup>142</sup> He went on to say, “Would the American people believe that despite the much-publicized and prayerful presidential decision to allow bombing of some oil depots a year ago, about three-fourths of the enemy’s petroleum storage targets had not yet come under attack?”<sup>143</sup> He further questioned, “Would the American people believe that in mid-1967, after two and one-half years of U.S. bombing of North Vietnam – an area about the size of Michigan – only 3 out of every 10 significant military targets had ever been struck by U.S. air power?”<sup>144</sup> Ford drove this home saying, “It is high time the American people knew what the real issue was. The real issue, Mr. Speaker, was whether we really have any hope of winning the Vietnam War.”<sup>145</sup> He concluded by declaring, “What is especially dishonest is secretly to forbid effective strategic action and publicly portray it as an honest try.”<sup>146</sup> Rather than personally attacking Johnson, or pandering to public opposition to the war, Ford revealed the president’s mistruths about the Vietnam War.

Even President Johnson respected Ford’s integrity. In the last days of his presidency, Johnson invited Ford to the Oval Office for a private meeting. The president said to Ford, “Jerry, you and I have had a lot of head-to-head confrontations. I’ve been pretty rough on you, and you’ve been a little rough on me at times. But I never doubted your integrity.”<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Ford, *Washington Review: A Report from Your Congressman*, 21 June 1951.

<sup>142</sup> Qtd., Doyle, *Gerald R. Ford: Selected Speeches*, 214.

<sup>143</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 214-215.

<sup>144</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>145</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>146</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>147</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 96.

The extent of Ford's unquestionable integrity was fully revealed to the American public during Ford's vice presidential confirmation hearings. Following Vice President Spiro Agnew's resignation, President Nixon considered nominating Ford for the position. Nixon advisor Patrick Buchanan argued for Ford saying, "He has the capacity and integrity to be a good president should something happen."<sup>148</sup> Nixon concurred and on October 10, 1973 under the twenty-fifth amendment, nominated Ford for vice president subject to approval by Congress.<sup>149</sup> Congress and the FBI subsequently conducted "the most thorough searches into the background of a nominee in the history of American politics."<sup>150</sup> The FBI unleashed 350 agents to scrutinize Ford's background.<sup>151</sup> Ford cooperated fully with the investigation and authorized complete access to his personal history. He instructed his "lawyer, his accountant, his banker, his doctor, his peers in the House, his personal friends, and his brothers, to put everything on the record."<sup>152</sup> Ford hoped that this transparency would "result in a greater sense of public confidence in government."<sup>153</sup> The FBI then interviewed over a thousand people and produced a 1,700 page report on Ford.<sup>154</sup> No improprieties or misconduct of any kind were revealed in the investigation.

Ford further underscored his commitment to unquestionable integrity during his confirmation hearings before Congress. In his opening remarks Ford stated his belief that "Truth is the glue on the bond that holds government together, and not only government, but civilization itself."<sup>155</sup> He went on to say, "Through my testimony it is my intention to replace misunderstanding with understanding, and to substitute truth for untruth."<sup>156</sup> When asked during

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<sup>148</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 208.

<sup>149</sup> Greene, *The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford*, 11.

<sup>150</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 26.

<sup>151</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 231.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>153</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>154</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 26-27.

<sup>155</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 235.

<sup>156</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 235.

the proceedings what personal characteristics were important to presidential leadership, Ford said “I think the president has to be a person of great truth and the American people have to believe that he is truthful.”<sup>157</sup> Congress believed in Ford’s integrity and confirmed his nomination with overwhelming margins of 387-35 in the House and 92-3 in the Senate.<sup>158</sup>

Vice President Ford’s unquestionable integrity was critically tested as the full extent of the Watergate scandal unfolded in 1974. Nixon had reassured Ford that he was not involved in the Watergate break in and Ford believed him. Ford said, “You have to believe the president and I did believe him.”<sup>159</sup> Given the value he placed on integrity, he therefore urged the president to fully disclose the facts. In a speech in St. Johns, Michigan, Ford said, “The way to clear up Watergate is for John Mitchell, John Dean, and any others who have publicly said they are not involved in, and had no information on Watergate, [to] go before the Senate Committee, take an oath, and deny it publicly.”<sup>160</sup>

However, when President Nixon finally confessed his involvement in Watergate at a cabinet meeting, Ford immediately distanced himself to protect his integrity. Ford issued what became known as his “declaration of independence” in August 1974.<sup>161</sup> Ford stated to the cabinet, “I came to a decision yesterday and you may be aware that I informed the press that because of commitments to Congress and the public, I’ll have no further comment on the issue because I am a party of interest.”<sup>162</sup> And when Nixon’s Chief of Staff, Alexander Haig, privately offered Vice President Ford several options, including an option for Ford to assume the presidency upon Nixon’s potential resignation in exchange for a pardon, Ford declined. With two

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<sup>157</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 247.

<sup>158</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 12.

<sup>159</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 152.

<sup>160</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>162</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 317.

witnesses, Ford read a statement to Haig over the phone that said, “I want you to understand that I have no intention of recommending what the president should do about resigning or not resigning.”<sup>163</sup> Ford’s integrity had stood up to the ultimate temptation of a sure path to becoming president of the United States.

Colleagues who knew Ford best agreed that Ford made no deal exchanging the presidency for a Nixon pardon. Michigan Senator Robert P. Griffin said “I am convinced that Ford did not agree to the pardon in advance.”<sup>164</sup> He argued that “Ford later went before Committee of Congress and stated under oath that no deal was involved.”<sup>165</sup> Similarly, Ford’s press secretary Jerald TerHorst said, “I do not think there was any private deal made with Richard Nixon that if he resigned, he would be given a pardon in thirty days. Jerry Ford is just not that kind of guy.”<sup>166</sup>

As with his commitment to unquestionable integrity with his colleagues and his constituents, Ford demonstrated his unquestionable integrity with the press during his congressional career through the height of the Watergate scandal. Newsweek reporter Tom DeFrank covered Ford during his Vice Presidency and remarked, “He was the most remarkably guileless political figure I’ve ever known.”<sup>167</sup> DeFrank traveled with Ford who took thirty-five trips to forty-one states and said that Ford “had an old-fashioned sense of public accountability” and “scheduled at least one press conference on every trip” despite the fact that he was “routinely hammered about his support for Nixon, Watergate, the tapes, impeachment, and the like.”<sup>168</sup> Ron Nessen, Ford’s Press Secretary from 1974 to 1977, said that unlike Nixon, Ford “didn’t have a

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<sup>163</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 307.

<sup>164</sup> Qtd., Thompson, *Gerald R. Ford: Twenty-Two Intimate Perspectives*, 22.

<sup>165</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>166</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>167</sup> DeFrank, *Write it When I’m Gone*, 5.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

list of enemy reporters. I think he was open and honest, and civil in his dealing with reporters.”<sup>169</sup> Given Ford’s strong commitment to integrity, he believed that meeting with the press was a critical obligation for an elected leader.<sup>170</sup> Ford’s steadfast and unshakable integrity became the hall mark of his leadership recognized by his constituents, his congressional peers in both parties, and the press.

### ***Inspirational Communication Weakness***

However, the remarkable integrity of Ford’s communication with constituents, peers and the press did not necessarily translate into inspiration in communicating with them. As he reflected on his career in public service, Ford said that if he were to return to college, “knowing what I know today – I’d concentrate on two areas: learning to write and to speak before an audience. Nothing in life is more important than the ability to communicate effectively.”<sup>171</sup> In his vice presidential acceptance speech Ford admitted, “I am a Ford, not a Lincoln. My addresses will never be as eloquent as Mr. Lincoln’s. But I will do my very best to equal his brevity and plain speaking.”<sup>172</sup> Having resigned himself to being plain speaking, he never mastered the ability to craft an engaging message to communicate a compelling vision and deliver it with the enthusiasm that could have inspired and motivated the American people to embrace his positions. He appeared robotic and awkward on television and even loyal supporters like Tom DeFrank unabashedly stated, “With rare exceptions, Ford was a dreadful orator.”<sup>173</sup> The failure to develop this skill would prevent Ford from articulating a compelling reason for the American

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<sup>169</sup> Qtd., Thompson, *Gerald R. Ford: Twenty-Two Intimate Perspectives*, 183.

<sup>170</sup> DeFrank, *Write it When I’m Gone*, 273.

<sup>171</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 50.

<sup>172</sup> Ford, “Remarks of Gerald R. Ford After Taking the Oath of Office as Vice President,” Speech Before Joint Session of Congress, Washington, D.C., 3 December 1973.

<sup>173</sup> DeFrank, *Write it When I’m Gone*, 4.

people and Congress to embrace the Helsinki accords and his controversial decision to attend the conference.

There were several reasons why Ford failed to develop this skill. First, the path he chose as he began his congressional career did not require compelling communication for his success. When he joined Congress, senior Michigan Representative Earl Michener told Ford, “You can become one of two kinds of Members of the House. You can either be a floor man and learn how to handle debate . . . or you can become a committee expert.”<sup>174</sup> Ford ultimately chose to become a committee expert. Work on the various Appropriations Subcommittees on which he served during his first ten years in Congress required the skills of relationship building, collaboration, and detailed analysis. The work did not require superior oratorical skills to be effective. This work did not demand that he envision and articulate new ideas, nor did it require that he publically defend his committees’ decisions. Ford said of this type of work, “My idea of vision is ensuring that we are making progress on a day-to-day basis. I want to know the accounting figures for how we did today and how we’re going to do tomorrow – and how we’re going to get there in practical terms.”<sup>175</sup> He dismissed vision as “just a fancy word people use to justify spending a lot of money.”<sup>176</sup> In 1961 after years of arduous and unpublicized committee work, Ford was rewarded for his approach with an award from the Political Science Association who described him glowingly saying, “He symbolizes the hard-working, competent legislator who eschews the more colorful, publicity seeking roles in favor of a solid record of achievement in the real work of the House: Committee work.”<sup>177</sup> With recognition like this for his committee work, Ford saw little reason to develop his communication skills.

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<sup>174</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 55.

<sup>175</sup> Qtd., Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 81.

<sup>176</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>177</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 71.

The second reason Ford didn't develop strong communication skills that he lacked natural talent in this area and willingly allowed himself to be upstaged by partners who possessed it. When he became House Minority Leader, he partnered with Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen in press conferences to articulate Republican legislative ideas. According to Ford, Senator Dirksen's "command of the language was extraordinary and his manner of speaking unique. He'd obfuscate with such flair and weave tales with such gusto that reporters soon forgot the questions they have asked."<sup>178</sup> In contrast, Ford bypassed flashy oratory for "facts and figures that some audiences considered boring."<sup>179</sup> Robert T. Hartmann was Minority Leader Ford's press counselor and recalled, "I found Ford was not inarticulate. He was very intelligent, but almost tone-deaf to a felicitous combination of words. And he did not see that words were for the purpose of making things happen."<sup>180</sup> Where Ford's television performances appeared "plain and businesslike," Dirksen's were inspiring, amusing, and witty.<sup>181</sup> Ford recalled that his staff voiced concern that Dirksen was "getting all the headlines" and in the process "squeezing you out."<sup>182</sup> But he was content with the partnership and did not see the need to develop the communication skills that could compete with the effervescent and memorable Dirksen on television.

In addition to these missed opportunities to develop strong communication skills, Ford's image was further challenged by President Johnson's characterization of him as unintelligent. As Ford's criticism of Johnson's Great Society and Vietnam War policies escalated, Johnson fought back with publically damaging rhetoric. Speech writer Robert Orben recalled that Johnson made frequent comments such as Ford was so dumb that he "couldn't chew gum and walk at the same

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<sup>178</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 82.

<sup>179</sup> Qtd., Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 10.

<sup>180</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 92.

<sup>181</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>182</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 82.

time.”<sup>183</sup> Without the strong public communication skills to defend himself, this image of Ford stuck.

However, perhaps the single strongest reason that Ford did not develop effective communication skills is that he simply didn’t need them to win elections. The campaign trail could have provided the single best opportunity to hone such skills. Yet he attained solid election victories to thirteen terms in the House of Representatives from Michigan’s Fifth District voters running without this skill. He fervently believed that the people of Michigan would elect him on his strong record of performance and his unquestionable integrity, rather than flowery oratory. Because of his long term success, the campaign advice he consistently gave to his Republican colleagues was simply, “Build a good record. Campaign on that record.”<sup>184</sup> Ironically, in the nation’s historic first application of the twenty-fifth amendment to the United States Constitution, Ford became America’s first vice president and then president without delivering a single campaign speech.

On August 9, 1974 Gerald R. Ford was sworn in as the thirty-eighth president of the United States. He entered the office with the fervently held internationalist belief that America was responsible for leading solutions toward global peace and that this peace could best be attained by maintaining America’s military strength. He was armed with the effective leadership skills of courage in the face of opposition, collaborative compromise through relationship building, and unquestionable integrity that he had honed throughout his congressional career. What he lacked was the ability to effectively and inspirationally communicate his ideas. In plain words and without the brilliant oratory skills of many of his predecessors, he made an important pledge to the world in his Swearing in Address. He said, “to the peoples and governments of all

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<sup>183</sup> Qtd., Thompson, *The Ford Presidency: Twenty-Two Intimate Perspectives of Gerald R. Ford*, 250.

<sup>184</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 102.



friendly nations – and I hope that could encompass the whole world – I pledge an uninterrupted and sincere search for peace.”<sup>185</sup> With this pledge and with these beliefs and strengths, he took office and began his work developing the foreign policy that would embrace and elevate the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and sign the Helsinki accords.

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<sup>185</sup> Ford, “Swearing in Ceremony,” Speech, Presidential Swearing In, Washington, D.C., 9 August 1974, 10.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **President Ford's Leadership at the Helsinki Conference**

The Helsinki accords signed by President Ford in 1975 at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe had their roots in a Soviet proposal more than two decades earlier. In 1954, the Soviets proposed a conference between the Eastern and Western nations of Europe that would ratify the political boundaries that followed World War II. The Western nations were skeptical of Soviet motives and resisted the idea. However, as the nature of the Cold War evolved from hostile confrontation to détente, and human rights were added to the negotiations, the two sides agreed to such a conference. Negotiations for the Helsinki Final Act began during the Nixon administration and concluded under the Ford administration. President Nixon's Soviet foreign policy of détente was characterized by appeasement and therefore resulted in a quiet, backseat role for the United States in the negotiations.

President Ford's Soviet foreign policy of détente demanded a more prominent leadership role in the Helsinki Conference. Driven by his joint beliefs in internationalism and peace through strength, and rooted in his integrity, President Ford supported the successful conclusion of the negotiations to include human rights and self-determination in the Final Act. He resolutely decided to attend the Helsinki Conference in person, despite the fact that he faced significant domestic headwinds from an oppositional public, the media, and Congress. Leveraging his strength of collaboration through relationship building, he conducted extensive personal diplomacy with leaders from Eastern bloc nations, Western NATO allies, and the Soviet Union. He delivered a compelling speech designed to encourage these leaders to keep the promises of human rights, self-determination, and equality articulated in the Helsinki accords.

### ***Prelude to Helsinki: Cold War Foreign Policy under Nixon and Ford***

Throughout most of Ford's career in Congress, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union was marked by hostile confrontation. The Soviet Union sought to advance its ideology of struggle toward a classless society and a command economic system ruled by authoritarian government. The United States sought to advance its ideology of individual freedom and a capitalist economic system ruled by democratic government. Each side built elaborate military and covert intelligence systems. Overt conflicts emerged in areas such as Korea and Vietnam as each superpower fought to promote its own ideology and contain its opponent's ideology. Hostilities peaked during the Cuban missile crisis where the superpowers contemplated unleashing their nuclear weapons and threatening the safety of the entire world.

In the final years of Ford's congressional career, the nature of the Cold War underwent a dramatic shift where hostility gave way to the more conciliatory policy of détente. Détente emerged as the logical Cold War policy between the United States and the Soviet Union for several reasons. First, the Soviet Union had reached nuclear weapon parity with the United States. Secretary of State Kissinger admitted, "In the late 1960's it became apparent that the Soviet Union, for practical purposes, had achieved a kind of rough parity with the United States."<sup>186</sup> The oil price increases that followed the Arab embargo benefited the Soviet Union who subsequently plowed its profits into military spending during a time when the United States dramatically cut its defense budget.<sup>187</sup> Second, the global economic stagnation that soon followed made extraordinary military spending burdensome and potential economic trade attractive for both superpowers. According to Soviet Ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, "The Soviet economy was stagnant" and therefore "the party establishment gradually

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<sup>186</sup> Kissinger, "Détente with the Soviet Union," Speech, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., 19 September 1974, 513.

<sup>187</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 212.

began to realize the need to satisfy the population's basic requirements more fully and to narrow the gap with the West in technology and the economy itself."<sup>188</sup> Similarly, the United States welcomed trade opportunities with the Soviet Union and China to stem its own contracting economy.<sup>189</sup> Third, each superpower was finding it difficult to control its increasingly independent allies. Since World War II, NATO allies enjoyed the security of its close ties with America. However, Dobrynin observed that by 1970 the "major Western powers, led by West Germany and France, increasingly sought to pursue a more independent policy and improve their relations with Moscow."<sup>190</sup> Nations such as Turkey and Greece "had become willing to defy the United States."<sup>191</sup> Similarly, the Soviets were experiencing cracks in its own alliance. The Soviet invasion to crush the rebellion in Czechoslovakia resulted in protests in Warsaw Pact countries such as Romania and Yugoslavia.<sup>192</sup> For these reasons, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed that more normalized relations were in their best interest.

But perhaps the most compelling reason for pursuing improved relations through détente was the superpowers' agreement that nuclear war had become an unacceptable risk. Kissinger acknowledged that, "each side has the capacity to destroy civilization as we know it."<sup>193</sup> He concluded that the "world's fears of holocaust and hopes for a better future have both hinged on the relationship between the two super-powers. In an era of strategic nuclear balance – when both sides have the capacity to destroy civilized life – there is no alternative to coexistence."<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 45.

<sup>189</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 282.

<sup>190</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence: America's Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents*, 194.

<sup>191</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenge of the 1970s*, 277.

<sup>192</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 153.

<sup>193</sup> Kissinger, "Détente with the Soviet Union," Speech, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., 19 September 1974, 512.

<sup>194</sup> Kissinger, "Moral Foundation of Foreign Policy," Speech, Upper Midwest Council, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 15 July 1975, 165.

Dobrynin agreed that to the Soviet Union “nuclear war was utterly unacceptable.”<sup>195</sup> In a top secret communique to President Nixon, Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev even proposed a heretofore unthinkable step beyond coexistence. In an idea he said “would guarantee a world free of nuclear war,” he proposed a treaty whereby the Soviet Union and the United States would “jointly retaliate against a [nuclear] attack” on the other.<sup>196</sup>

Under these conditions President Richard Nixon, along with his National Security Advisor and later Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, designed the Soviet foreign policy of détente. The twin goals of their policy were to create a stable relationship with the Soviet Union that could ensure world peace and to firmly establish American world leadership. Kissinger set out “to reclaim for the United States its position as the dominant player in world affairs that it had, arguably, lost as the result of the Vietnam War.”<sup>197</sup> Kissinger concluded that “there can be no peaceful international order without a constructive relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union.”<sup>198</sup> Nixon met Brezhnev at the 1972 Moscow Summit and signed a landmark document called the U.S.-Soviet Basic Principles Agreement that would guide the development of this constructive relationship.<sup>199</sup> These principles included the importance of avoiding confrontations, the desire for peaceful coexistence, and the renunciation of spheres of influence in the world.<sup>200</sup>

Stemming from these principles, Nixon’s policy of détente had three major prongs. The first prong was negotiations on strategic arms limitations. President Nixon successfully negotiated the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT I) in which the superpowers agreed to

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<sup>195</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 193.

<sup>196</sup> Brezhnev, Memorandum of Conversation, Moscow, Soviet Union, 26 October 1974, 6.

<sup>197</sup> Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, xvi.

<sup>198</sup> Kissinger, “Détente with the Soviet Union,” Speech, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., 19 September 1974, 505.

<sup>199</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 48.

<sup>200</sup> Kissinger, “Détente with the Soviet Union,” Speech, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., 19 September 1974, 509.

“cap the number of intercontinental and submarine-launched ballistic missiles each side could deploy.”<sup>201</sup> The second prong was linkage between economic, political, and military cooperation. Nixon believed the Soviets should “be brought to understand that they cannot expect to reap the benefits of co-operation in one area while seeking to take advantage of tension or confrontation elsewhere.”<sup>202</sup> According to Kissinger, the purpose of linkage was to give the Soviets “economic concessions in return for political stabilization.”<sup>203</sup> The third prong was the Nixon Doctrine which created a transformational change to America’s longstanding policy of containment. Under this doctrine America would continue to defend its NATO allies, but when friendly governments outside the NATO alliance found themselves under military threat, they would be encouraged to handle their own defense.<sup>204</sup> With this declaration, Nixon intended to prevent costly American entanglements such as such as the Vietnam War.

To avoid confrontation and advance détente, Nixon and Brezhnev had jointly agreed to noninterference in each other’s internal affairs. The Basic Principles Agreement signed at the Moscow Summit emphasized that the “differences in ideology and in the social systems of the USA and the USSR are not obstacles to the bilateral development of normal relations based on the principles of sovereignty, equality, noninterference in internal affairs.”<sup>205</sup> This was in essence “the first time an American administration maintained that communist ideology was no obstacle to having a fruitful relationship with another nation.”<sup>206</sup> In fact, in a television address during his historic Moscow Summit trip, Nixon stated, “The only sound basis for a peaceful and progressive international order is sovereign equality and mutual respect. We believe in the right

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<sup>201</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 199-200.

<sup>202</sup> Qtd., Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, 35.

<sup>203</sup> Kissinger, “Secretary Kissinger Interviewed for the New York Times,” *Department of State Bulletin*, 106.

<sup>204</sup> Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, 53.

<sup>205</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 48.

<sup>206</sup> Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, 66.

of each nation to chart its own course . . . without interference from other nations.”<sup>207</sup> As a result, Nixon’s policy of détente lacked any emphasis on the freedoms and human rights so ingrained in American ideology.

Although Nixon’s policy of détente appeased the Soviet’s poor record on human rights, it did not appease the Soviet’s tumultuous relationship with its Communist rival, China. In his highly secretive and historic trip in 1972, Nixon established diplomatic relations with China and his strategy of triangular diplomacy. The two nations shared an interest in settling the Vietnam conflict. Nixon wanted a respectable exit for the United States; China wanted to end the fighting on its southern border so it could concentrate on the Soviet threat to its northern border.<sup>208</sup> President Nixon and Chairman Mao Tse Tung signed the Shanghai Communique which stated that neither the United States nor the People’s Republic of China would seek dominance in the Asia-Pacific sphere, but would oppose any nation who did.<sup>209</sup> With this agreement, Nixon created a situation where America could “play its Cold War adversaries against each other” at a time when China and the Soviet Union “were by then so hostile to one another that they competed for Washington’s favor.”<sup>210</sup>

The Helsinki accords at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe did not play an important role in President Nixon’s policy of détente. Nixon initially expressed two concerns. First, he was skeptical of Brezhnev’s motives for the conference, believing the Soviets were using it to give Moscow greater control over Eastern Europe.<sup>211</sup> Second, he worried that the conference would threaten American leadership in NATO by encouraging Congress to reduce

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<sup>207</sup> Qtd., Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 48.

<sup>208</sup> Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, 151.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>210</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 155.

<sup>211</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 37.

U.S. forces in Europe.<sup>212</sup> As such, Dobrynin noted that “the United States had initially been demonstratively indifferent” to the Helsinki Conference “in the belief that it had nothing to gain.”<sup>213</sup> However, Nixon eventually agreed to U.S. participation when the Soviets expressed its willingness to use the conference as a means to discuss mutually balanced force reductions (MBFR) in Europe.<sup>214</sup> As negotiations for the conference began in 1973, the Soviets and their East European allies sought to advance the confirmation of post-WWII borders while the West European allies sought to advance a human rights agenda.

Nixon and Kissinger took a position of appeasement toward both the Soviet Union and Western allies during the initial conference negotiations. Kissinger reflected, “We didn’t want to break with our allies or confront the Soviets.”<sup>215</sup> When the Soviets worried that the human rights elements of the negotiations would undermine the Soviet regime, Kissinger stated the United States would “use its influence not to embarrass the Soviet Union or raise provocative issues.”<sup>216</sup> Kissinger also urged his Western allies to be more flexible on their human rights demands during the negotiations. He irritated his NATO allies when asking for this flexibility and declaring the Soviet system “would not be changed if Western newspapers were put on sale in a few kiosks in Moscow.”<sup>217</sup> Kissinger admitted that during the Nixon administration, the “CSCE was never an element of US foreign policy. We never pushed it and stayed a half step behind our allies in the process.”<sup>218</sup> It is doubtful that President Nixon would have even attended the conference in Helsinki if he had remained in office.

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<sup>212</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 36-37.

<sup>213</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents*, 345.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

<sup>215</sup> Kissinger, Memorandum of Conversation at Cabinet Meeting, 8 August 1975, 2.

<sup>216</sup> Qtd., Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 77.

<sup>217</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>218</sup> Kissinger, Memorandum of Conversation at Cabinet Meeting, 8 August 1975, 2.



Gerald Ford assumed responsibility for America's foreign policy when he took over the presidency upon Nixon's resignation in 1974. Ford confirmed that Nixon's two goals of world peace and American leadership would remain his own goals. In his vice presidential confirmation hearings he had stated that among the most important roles of a president was "achieving peace throughout the world."<sup>219</sup> And he underscored this goal in his Swearing in Address when he stated his intent to lead a "sincere search for peace."<sup>220</sup> He similarly asserted his goal of American global leadership. In his Foreign Policy Address to Congress in April, 1975, Ford recalled, "The leadership of the United States of America, since the end of World War Two, has sustained and advanced the security, well-being, and freedom of millions of human beings" and repeated President Truman's belief that "If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world."<sup>221</sup>

To achieve these two goals, Ford assured foreign leaders that he intended to continue the key elements of Nixon's policy of détente with the Soviet Union. Ford immediately sent a letter to Brezhnev with this assurance.<sup>222</sup> Brezhnev responded favorably to this declaration in a letter to Nixon during the transition saying, "We have received with satisfaction President Ford's statement of his intentions to continue the course in our relations aimed at their further broadening and deepening."<sup>223</sup> Ford's announcement to retain Henry Kissinger as Secretary of State further solidified his intent to continue the policy of détente. Dobrynin worried that Ford was "well known in the [Soviet Union] for his sharply uncompromising statements as a congressman about the Soviet Union."<sup>224</sup> However, on the day he was sworn in, Ford met with

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<sup>219</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 247.

<sup>220</sup> Ford, "Swearing in Ceremony," Speech, Presidential Swearing In, Washington, D.C., 9 August 1974, 10.

<sup>221</sup> Ford, "Foreign Policy Address," Speech, Joint Session of Congress, Washington, D.C, 10 April 1975, 5.

<sup>222</sup> Qtd., Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 319.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

Dobrynin to assure him that “as president he now would be much more discreet in his public statements.”<sup>225</sup> Ford later informed a joint session of Congress that, “The United States and the Soviet Union share an interest in lessening tensions and building a more stable relationship.”<sup>226</sup> Dobrynin concluded, “Despite the constitutional upheavals caused by Watergate, the transition from Richard Nixon to Gerald Ford was successful, and with it the continuation of the policy of Soviet-American détente.”<sup>227</sup>

Ford’s détente strategies included a continuation of Nixon’s arms reduction and trade increases through linkage. In his Foreign Policy Address to Congress, Ford stated that, “Central to U.S.-Soviet relations today is the critical negotiation to control strategic nuclear weapons.”<sup>228</sup> To that end, Ford and Brezhnev met at the Vladivostok Summit in 1974 and successfully negotiated principles and a framework that would guide future long term arms reductions.<sup>229</sup> Simultaneously with arms reductions, Ford worked to expand trade with the Soviet Union.<sup>230</sup> Kissinger underscored that “one important area for invigorated cooperative action is economic policy.”<sup>231</sup> Under Ford, trade with the Soviet Union had increased from under \$200 million in 1970 to greater than \$2 billion in 1976.<sup>232</sup> Ford leveraged his strong collaboration and relationship building skills during his meetings with Brezhnev. Kissinger found Ford to be a “superior negotiator to Nixon, due largely to his personality.”<sup>233</sup> Similarly, Dobrynin said Ford was “simpler, more compassionate, and approachable” than Nixon.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 320.

<sup>226</sup> Ford, “Foreign Policy Address,” Speech, Joint Session of Congress, Washington, D.C, 10 April 1975, 84.

<sup>227</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 319.

<sup>228</sup> Ford, “Foreign Policy Address,” Speech, Joint Session of Congress, Washington, D.C, 10 April 1975, 84.

<sup>229</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 320.

<sup>230</sup> “President Ford: The Man and his Record,” *Congressional Quarterly*, 71.

<sup>231</sup> Kissinger, “Détente with the Soviet Union,” Speech to Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., 19 September 1974, 509.

<sup>232</sup> Ford to Brezhnev, Letter, 24 November 1976.

<sup>233</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 284.

<sup>234</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 341.

Despite the continuation of détente through pleasant relations, there were clear differences between Ford and Nixon’s foreign policy. The first was Ford’s intention to restore America’s military strength while pursuing arms limitations with the Soviet Union. In a discussion of differences between Ford and Nixon, Kissinger informed Dobrynin that Ford “did not purposely promote the arms race, but was devoted to the patriotic idea of ‘a strong America.’”<sup>235</sup> Kissinger also admitted in a conversation with Chinese Vice Premier of the State Council Teng, that although “there was no difference between President Nixon’s policy toward the Soviet Union and President Ford’s, that President Ford is a nuance tougher toward the Soviet Union.”<sup>236</sup> This toughness translated into a commitment to maintain America’s strong military. In his Foreign Policy Address to Congress, Ford unequivocally stated, “As long as I am president, America will maintain its strength.”<sup>237</sup> He stated with conviction, “Let no ally doubt our determination to maintain a defense that is second to none” and forcefully warned, “Let no potential adversary believe that our difficulties or our debates mean a slackening of our national will.”<sup>238</sup> To his NATO allies he committed, “Our military power remains, and will continue to remain, second to none – of this let there be no doubt.”<sup>239</sup> According to Ford’s brand of détente, arms limitations coexisted with military strength. Where Nixon had begun to appease the Soviets as partners, Ford referred to them as adversaries and stated, “Improvement of relations with adversaries does not mean any relaxation of our national vigilance. On the contrary, it is the firm maintenance of both strength and vigilance that makes possible steady progress toward a safer and more peaceful world.”<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Qtd., Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 340.

<sup>236</sup> Kissinger, Memorandum of Conversation, Peking, People’s Republic of China, 20 October 1975, 11.

<sup>237</sup> Ford, “Foreign Policy Address,” Speech, Joint Session of Congress, Washington, D.C, 10 April 1975, 85.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 57 & 108.

<sup>239</sup> Ford, “Remarks Before NATO,” Speech, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of NATO Signing, 29 May 1975, 13.

<sup>240</sup> Ford, “Foreign Policy Address,” Speech, Joint Session of Congress, Washington, D.C, 10 April 1975, 106.

The second difference between Ford and Nixon's foreign policy was their stand on human rights. Ford brought human rights to the forefront of his foreign policy. He saw them as an inherently important moral foundation to foreign policy in a way that Richard Nixon had not. As a congressman in 1969, Ford had declared that "the greatest hypocrisy" was closing "our eyes to the wrongs that the Soviet Union has done to millions of human beings deprived of individual freedoms and national independence."<sup>241</sup> During his vice presidential confirmation hearings, Ford stated that the U.S. should look to use trade and the American market as a way to incentivize human rights with its foreign trading partners.<sup>242</sup> Ford recognized that this wasn't easy when he said, "There becomes a point, however, where you just can't tell another country they have to do it" but concluded, "We can certainly try."<sup>243</sup> Once he became president, Ford put this belief to practice. The briefing book prepared for his foreign policy debate during the 1976 election retrospectively captured the human rights stance the Ford administration had taken. This book described Ford's goals saying, "The objectives of freedom for all men and women, the dignity and security of the individual, and the sanctity of law must always be fundamental to our foreign policy."<sup>244</sup> In a complete reversal of Nixon's declaration of nonintervention at the Moscow Summit, Ford went on to say in this book, "My administration has spoken out forcefully for human rights and supports strengthening the international protection of human rights."<sup>245</sup> To underscore this point, Ford hand wrote in the margin, "We stand on moral principles."<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Qtd., "Analysis of the Philosophy and Voting Record of Representative Gerald R. Ford," The Library of Congress, 25 October 1973.

<sup>242</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 244-245.

<sup>243</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 244-245.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>246</sup> Ford, "Second Debate Briefing Book: Morality in Foreign Policy," 30 September 1976, 3.

As a member of the Ford administration, even Secretary of State Kissinger now began discussing the importance of human rights. In a September 1974 speech, Kissinger stated, “As security concerns recede, humane concerns come again to the fore.”<sup>247</sup> Having previously assured the Soviets he would use American influence to avoid Soviet embarrassment on human rights issues at the Helsinki Conference, Kissinger now stated, “We shall insist on responsible behavior by the Soviet Union and use it as the primary index of our relationship. Beyond this we will use our influence to the maximum to alleviate suffering and to respond to humane appeals.”<sup>248</sup> In a subsequent speech leading up to the Helsinki Conference, Kissinger reminded Americans that, “We have always stood for something beyond ourselves – a beacon to the oppressed from other lands” and “the United States will speak up for human rights in appropriate international forums and exchanges with other governments.”<sup>249</sup> This marked change in Kissinger’s stance on human rights occurred concurrently with the presidential transition from Nixon to Ford.

In light of his greater commitment to military strength and human rights leadership, President Ford placed significantly greater importance on the Helsinki accords and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe than President Nixon. Ford decided to elevate America’s role from passive appeasement to proactive leadership. In his Foreign Policy Address to Congress, he stated the importance of setting a realistic agenda for détente and “one item on that agenda must be to assure that the promises made in the [upcoming] Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe are translated into action to advance freedom and human

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<sup>247</sup> Kissinger, “Détente with the Soviet Union,” Speech to Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., 19 September 1974, 509.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 518.

<sup>249</sup> Kissinger, “Moral Foundation of Foreign Policy,” Speech, Upper Midwest Council, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 15 July 1975, 162 & 167.

dignity for all Europeans.”<sup>250</sup> And a now fully aligned Kissinger echoed this sentiment with similar rhetoric in a speech of his own stating his desire “to conclude the conference on European security and cooperation in a manner that promotes both security and human aspirations.”<sup>251</sup> Unlike Nixon, President Ford committed to attend the conference in person.

### ***President Ford’s Leadership Challenges***

Although Ford intended to play this assertive leadership role, he faced unprecedented headwinds as he sought to advance his foreign policy and the Helsinki Conference. Kissinger recalled, “No new president since Harry S. Truman inherited quite the same gamut of foreign policy challenges in his first few weeks in office, and none since Lincoln in so uncongenial a domestic environment.”<sup>252</sup> The nation was in crisis on two fronts. The first was a failing economy driven by the unprecedented coexistence of inflation and unemployment. The second was the lack of trust in the American executive branch brought on by the scandals of the Vietnam War and Watergate. Trust in the executive branch reached an all-time low of only 40 percent in 1974.<sup>253</sup> Stemming from these towering crises of economic failure and mistrust in the office of the president, President Ford faced several daunting leadership challenges as he sought to advance his foreign policy and the Helsinki accords.

The first challenge was neo-isolationism where a wounded public began to resist American involvement in world affairs. Ford reflected in his 1977 State of the Union address, “In the grave situation which prevailed in August, 1974, our will to maintain our international leadership was in doubt.”<sup>254</sup> American optimism from post-World War II economic growth,

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<sup>250</sup> Ford, “Foreign Policy Address,” Speech Before Joint Session of Congress, Washington, D.C., 10 April 1975, 25.

<sup>251</sup> Kissinger, “Détente with the Soviet Union,” Speech to Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., 19 September 1974, 519.

<sup>252</sup> Qtd., Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 274.

<sup>253</sup> Jones, “Americans’ Trust in Government Generally Down this Year,” Gallup News Service, 29 December 2013.

<sup>254</sup> Ford, “The State of the Union,” Speech, Joint Session of Congress, Washington, D.C., 12 January 1977, 97.

communist containment, and the moon landing had disappeared.<sup>255</sup> The pessimism that replaced it caused Americans to turn inward with a desire to withdraw from world affairs. In 1974, fully “one-quarter of Americans described themselves as ‘isolationist.’”<sup>256</sup> A 1975 Harris poll revealed that only 39 percent of Americans supported “military intervention to defend Western Europe.”<sup>257</sup> As an ardent internationalist, Ford acknowledged, but firmly resisted, this emerging view. In 1973 Ford had warned European allies that if they opposed a mutual troop reduction pact with the Soviets, Congress would likely demand U.S. troop reductions overseas.<sup>258</sup> He warned them that there was a growing sentiment among the public to bring American troops home and admitted, “I don’t like it, but it is a fact of life.”<sup>259</sup> Facing this difficult neo-isolationist sentiment, President Ford resisted congressional and public pressure to focus on the nation’s crippling domestic issues at the expense of asserting America’s leadership abroad with initiatives such as America’s active participation in the Helsinki accords.

The second leadership challenge Ford faced was a highly critical media. Frustrated by the secrecy and lies of the Johnson and Nixon administrations, the press became increasingly aggressive. Ford’s Press Secretary Ron Nessen said, “It was the period after Watergate and Vietnam and we had a pretty low opinion of our leaders. . . . So there was that kind of cynicism that colored all the reporting.”<sup>260</sup> He recalled a prevailing sense that the media “had grown contemptuous” in how it covered the president and “Ford had become the first victim of that.”<sup>261</sup> Presidential Assistant James Cannon said, “I think the media never did justice to President Ford. . . . Some reporters wrote story after story suggesting that he was dull, kind of bumbling

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<sup>255</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 2.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>258</sup> “Gerald Ford: The Man and his Record,” *Congressional Quarterly*, 70.

<sup>259</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>260</sup> Qtd., Thompson, *The Ford Presidency: Twenty-Two Intimate Perspectives of Gerald R. Ford*, 200.

<sup>261</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 187.

physically, and lacking in charisma.”<sup>262</sup> Ford gave the media further fodder with unfortunate falls. While traveling to meet with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in Vienne, Ford stumbled and fell from the plane.<sup>263</sup> Nessen concluded, “It is true that ridicule is a damaging weapon, and of course Ford was ridiculed by Johnny Carson in his monologue every night, and by Chevy Chase on Saturday Night Live.”<sup>264</sup> These portrayals irreparably damaged Ford’s image as a leader by implying “congruence between Ford’s athletic missteps and his intellectual powers.”<sup>265</sup> It became increasingly difficult for Ford to advance his foreign policy of détente and the important role of Helsinki accords in the face of such a critical, unforgiving, and even harassing media.

The third and most serious challenge Ford faced was the power shift from the executive branch to the legislative branch. This power shift resulted in a marked increase in congressional involvement in foreign policy. Stung by the lies and secrecy of previous administrations, the Congress “ached to reclaim some of the power lost to the executive branch.”<sup>266</sup> Ironically, Ford had encouraged this shift as a congressman. In a 1965 speech Ford had said, “there are disturbing signs of slow erosion in the power of the legislature, build-up of awesome power in the executive, and regrettable change in the intended direction of the Judiciary. Each is a threat to freedom.”<sup>267</sup> Motivated by this sentiment, Nixon’s foreign policy “provoked Congress into reclaiming much of the authority over the conduct of national security policy that it had abdicated during the early Cold War.”<sup>268</sup> Ford was the first president to battle this immensely

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<sup>262</sup> Qtd., Thompson, *The Ford Presidency: Twenty-Two Intimate Perspectives of Gerald R. Ford*, 160.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-187.

<sup>264</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>265</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 51.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>267</sup> Qtd., Doyle, *Gerald R. Ford Selected Speeches*, 189.

<sup>268</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 416.



suspicious Congress.<sup>269</sup> Kissinger found that his “policies were now under much tighter congressional scrutiny and the conduct of secret diplomacy had become all but impossible.”<sup>270</sup>

President Ford proactively nurtured a more collaborative relationship with Congress than Kissinger. However, the power shift resulted in the passage of legislation that placed severe restrictions on his ability to run foreign policy. For example, Congress passed the War Powers Act in 1973 designed to restrict presidential authority over troop deployment. This highly restrictive act “imposed a sixty-day limit on all future military deployments without congressional consent.”<sup>271</sup> Another example was the Budget Impoundment and Control Act designed to increase congressional control over defense spending. This act “allowed Congress to intervene if the president cut spending or cancelled program.”<sup>272</sup> It also established the Congressional Budget Office so instead of simply accepting the president’s budget, Congress was “now armed with its own arsenal of experts, figures, and facts” with regard to defense and military spending.<sup>273</sup> Yet another example was the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Trade Reform Act of 1975. This act prevented the Soviet Union from gaining its sought after Most Favored Nation status with the United States by making this status conditional on compliance with greater Jewish emigration freedom from the Soviet Union.<sup>274</sup> A final crippling example was Senator Jackson’s arms equality resolution. This resolution required equality in all weapons systems in the SALT II negotiations, as opposed to the weapons asymmetry principle that governed the SALT I negotiations.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 76.

<sup>270</sup> Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, 301.

<sup>271</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 177.

<sup>272</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 67.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>274</sup> Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, 379.

<sup>275</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 200.

These executive branch restrictions severely hampered the U.S.-Soviet relationship upon which the successful execution of détente and the Helsinki accords depended. These actions infuriated both Ford and Brezhnev. President Ford stated that, “Congress was more rebellious and assertive of its rights and privileges – and also more irresponsible – than it had been for years.”<sup>276</sup> Dobrynin himself said that, “probably no other single question did more to sour the atmosphere of détente than the question of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union.”<sup>277</sup> Following the passage of the Trade Reform Act, Brezhnev wrote to Ford refusing to repay World War II Lend-Lease debts and declaring that “grave damage has thus been inflicted to our trade and economic relations.”<sup>278</sup> In his Foreign Policy Address, Ford admonished Congress saying that their irresponsible actions “have damaged our foreign policy” and resulted in lost “jobs and business – which could have gone to Americans.”<sup>279</sup> These congressional controls strained Ford’s relationship with the Soviet Union and limited his decision making power.

However, the nation’s crises did provide a silver lining for President Ford. The country’s mistrust resulted in an increased demand for morality in government. Although he faced a neo-isolationist public, a cynical press, and a controlling Congress, this demand for morality played to Ford’s leadership strength of integrity. The nation’s problems sparked a prevailing “discontent with the world as it was, whether that meant the nuclear arms race, social and economic injustice, the war in Vietnam, repression in Eastern Europe.”<sup>280</sup> The Watergate scandal had illustrated that Americans were more supportive of “the rule of law than the wielding of power.”<sup>281</sup> President Ford embraced this demand for the rule of law when he stated in his

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<sup>276</sup> Qtd., Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 69.

<sup>277</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 334.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>279</sup> Ford, “Foreign Policy Address,” Speech, Joint Session of Congress, Washington, D.C, 10 April 1975, 88 & 89.

<sup>280</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 147.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

Swearing in Address, “My fellow Americans, our long national nightmare is over. Our Constitution works; our great Republic is a government of laws and not of men. Here, the people rule.”<sup>282</sup> And this demand for morality emboldened Ford’s determination to use American leadership to advance global human rights in his foreign policy. Ford laid out a vision of moral American leadership in his Foreign Policy Address saying, “I see a compassionate America, its heart reaching out to orphans, to refugees and to our fellow human beings afflicted by war and tyranny and hunger.”<sup>283</sup> He appealed to God to be America’s moral compass saying, “And may God ever guide us to do what is right.”<sup>284</sup>

President Ford did not have the freedoms and powers that his predecessors had enjoyed in the foreign policy arena. The United States was resistant to Ford’s policy of détente due to its neo-isolationist sentiment, tried to control it with a shift in power from the executive branch to Congress, and criticized it in the era of heightened media cynicism. This combination of the challenges, along with the demand for morality that sprung from the nation’s crises, offered Ford a unique leadership opportunity at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe at Helsinki in 1975. But unlike other foreign policy actions he tried to advance, his participation at the Helsinki Conference could not be prevented by Congress. Because the Helsinki agreement was a political and not a legal document, it did not require congressional approval. He could justify his leadership participation to a neo-isolationist public and a critical media by credibly leveraging his goal of advancing human and political freedom that was rooted in the principles of own his widely acknowledged integrity. The Helsinki Conference had the potential to be a powerful platform to restore confidence in the integrity of the American government both at home and abroad.

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<sup>282</sup> Ford, “Swearing in Ceremony,” Speech, Presidential Swearing In, Washington, D.C., 9 August 1974, 12.

<sup>283</sup> Ford, “Foreign Policy Address,” Speech, Joint Session of Congress, Washington, D.C, 10 April 1975, 111.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

### ***Ford's Helsinki Conference Leadership: Negotiating with Collaborative Compromise***

The Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe would be “the largest gathering of European heads of state since the Congress of Vienna in 1815.”<sup>285</sup> Ford believed the conference was an important “mission of peace and progress” with provisions that “represent political as well as moral” commitments.<sup>286</sup> He said these are commitments “I have supported through my entire public life” including the “aspirations of freedom and national independence of peoples everywhere.”<sup>287</sup> In sharp contrast to his predecessor’s passive role, President Ford chose to play an active role in the conference leveraging the beliefs and leadership strengths he had developed throughout his military and congressional career. First, he used his collaboration skills to bring the negotiations for human rights, self-determination, and the agreement for arms reduction talks to a successful close. Second, he used his relationship building skills and courage in the face of opposition to attend the conference in person in despite tremendous public, media, and congressional pressure to forgo the conference. Third, he used his collaborative relationship building strengths to conduct extensive and visible personal diplomacy to advance America’s relationships with East European nations, West European allies, and the Soviet Union throughout the conference. Finally, Ford delivered a speech that clearly asserted his internationalist stance on America’s leadership role in world peace and challenged the signatories to uphold the important promises of human and political freedoms they would make in signing the Final Act. The Final Act that would be signed by 35 participating nations and the Vatican contained agreements on political and military cooperation, economic cooperation, and humanitarian cooperation. Importantly, the document would provide a standard by which the nations could assess each other’s compliance with the agreements.

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<sup>285</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 298.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>287</sup> Ford, “President Ford’s Departure Statement,” Speech, Washington, D.C., 26 July 1975, 4.

President Ford began his leadership with an elevation in America's participation in the negotiations of the agreements in the Helsinki Final Act. In a significant departure from the passive appeasement approach taken by the Nixon administration, Ford said with international fervor, "The United States will participate fully in this process" because "American security and well-being are tied to the security and the stability of Europe."<sup>288</sup> The first negotiation achievement was an agreement on arms reductions talks. Brezhnev had been determined to bring the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe to fruition in order to gain the acknowledgement of post-World War II borders by the NATO allies. According to Kissinger, Soviet ardor for the conference had left them to be exploited in three ways, one of which was the initiation of Mutual Balanced Force Reduction talks.<sup>289</sup> In exchange for his presence at the conference, Ford demanded talks on mutual strategic arms and troop reductions in Europe.<sup>290</sup> Ford declared of the negotiations, "The Warsaw Pact nations met important Western preconditions" including "the force reduction talks now underway in Vienna before our agreement to go to Helsinki."<sup>291</sup> In a meeting in February 1975 during the negotiations, Kissinger and Gromyko issued a joint statement agreeing "that active efforts should be made to achieve positive results in mutual reduction of forces and armaments in Central Europe."<sup>292</sup>

The Ford administration's second negotiation achievement was the inclusion of political rights to peaceful border settlement in the Helsinki Final Act. According to Ford, "in exchange for our agreement that 'legitimate' postwar boundaries were inviolable, the Soviets had conceded that national borders could be changed by peaceful means" which Ford believed "represented a

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<sup>288</sup> Ford, "President Ford Attends Conference on Security and Cooperation: Arrival Remarks," Speech, Helsinki, Finland, 29 July, 1975, *Department of State Bulletin*, 302.

<sup>289</sup> Kissinger to Ford, Memorandum, Helsinki, Finland, 30 July 1975, 2.

<sup>290</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 399.

<sup>291</sup> Ford, "European Security Conference Discussed by President Ford: Statement by President Ford," Speech, Washington, D.C., 25 July 1975, *Department of State Bulletin*, 205.

<sup>292</sup> Kissinger and Gromyko, "Text of U.S.-U.S.S.R. Joint Statement Issued at Geneva February 17<sup>th</sup>," 302.

real victory for our foreign policy.”<sup>293</sup> He reasoned that “the Russian tanks that had rolled into Prague in 1968 were implementing the Brezhnev Doctrine that said the Soviets had the right to intervene militarily to keep their client states in line. At Helsinki they would be *renouncing* that policy.”<sup>294</sup> Ford declared of this agreement, “We have obtained the public commitment of the Warsaw Pact governments to the possibility of peaceful adjustment of frontiers” which is “a major concession” from the Soviet Union.<sup>295</sup> Dobrynin concurred with Ford’s assessment of the negotiations stating, “in exchange for the recognition of frontiers established after the war, the Soviet Union recognized the lawfulness of changing national boundaries in Europe ‘by peaceful means,’” which he admitted had “preserved the possibility of reunifying Germany.”<sup>296</sup>

The Ford administration’s third and most difficult negotiation achievement was the inclusion of human rights in the Helsinki Final Act in partnership with his Western allies. Human rights were placed on the Helsinki agenda by the European Community when negotiations began in 1972.<sup>297</sup> However, according to Dobrynin, “the Soviet Union did all it could to diminish the significance of the [human rights principles] of the [Final Act’s] third basket, for it still believed humanitarian issues to be domestic matters.”<sup>298</sup> The Soviet negotiators argued that “human rights and self-determination were not relevant to relations among European states.”<sup>299</sup> Nixon had acquiesced. However, Ford decided to actively support his Western allies in their quest to advance human rights. Ford insisted that the Soviet Union agree to follow standards for human rights and the free movement of people and ideas across Europe as part of the Helsinki

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<sup>293</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 298-299.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 298-299.

<sup>295</sup> Ford, “European Security Conference Discussed by President Ford,” Speech, Washington, D.C, 25 July 1975, *The Department of State Bulletin*, 205.

<sup>296</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 347.

<sup>297</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 28.

<sup>298</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 345.

<sup>299</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 58.

agreements.<sup>300</sup> As the negotiations were underway, Ford summarized his approach to these human rights negotiations in a personal meeting with Pope John Paul VI saying, “We do not think the Western European nations should capitulate and give in to Russia. We urge our allies to insist on substance so that the Warsaw Pact nations do not prevail.”<sup>301</sup> He invited the Pope to assert his influence as well stating, “Any influence in that area would be to the best advantage of mankind.”<sup>302</sup>

Under Ford’s leadership, it was Kissinger who played an instrumental role in bringing the final human rights agreement to closure. Despite his previous ambivalence toward the negotiations, he now urged Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko to accept the human rights conditions requested by the West.<sup>303</sup> In the spring of 1975, a team of NATO delegates advanced a proposal for increased human contact and the free flow of information to be included in Basket Three of the Final Act.<sup>304</sup> Kissinger subsequently met with Gromyko and informed him that this proposal was the “West’s absolute precondition for closure” on the Final Act.<sup>305</sup> According to Kissinger, “on the so-called Basket 3, which contains the human rights provisions, the outcome of the conference was substantially a Soviet acceptance of a joint Western proposal that was made as a final agreed position in early May [1975].”<sup>306</sup> In exchange for making the human rights concession, the Soviets won the concession of the ‘non-intervention in internal affairs’ clause appearing ahead of the human rights clause in the Final Act.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 400.

<sup>301</sup> Ford, “Draft Memorandum of Conversation: Meeting of President Ford with Pope Paul VI,” Vatican City, 3 June 1975, 7.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>303</sup> Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, 433-434.

<sup>304</sup> Qtd., Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 85.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>306</sup> Kissinger, “Secretary Kissinger’s News Conference of July 25,” CSCE, Helsinki, Finland, 25 July 1975.

<sup>307</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 61.

With Soviet acceptance of this proposal, the negotiations steered by President Ford were complete. Kissinger held a news conference that announced the outcome of the negotiations and Ford's intention to attend the forthcoming Helsinki Conference in July saying,

“The position the United States took throughout the conference was that we would attend the conference at the highest level if . . . sufficient progress were made to justify it. That ‘sufficient progress’ in the so-called Basket 3 on human rights and progress on military provisions of the advance notifications of maneuvers and, finally, on the clause with respect to peaceful change in Basket 1 on the statement of principles . . . were substantially attained.”<sup>308</sup>

The two years of intensive negotiations for the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe that spanned from July 1973 through June 1975 resulted in a document called the Helsinki Final Act. The Final Act included four baskets of principles and agreements. Basket One was entitled “Questions Relating to Security in Europe” and dealt with the political and military foundations of maintaining peace in Europe. The countries aligned on a principle to jointly promote peace. This principle stated agreement to a common goal of “promoting better relations among themselves and ensuring conditions in which their people can live in true and lasting peace from any threat to or attempt against their security.”<sup>309</sup> Several agreements followed in order to obtain this goal. Importantly, the countries agreed to respect each other's sovereign equality, along with the right to independently select their own political, social, economic, and cultural systems.<sup>310</sup> As a result of this sovereign equality, the nations agreed to the right of self-determination. Each nation had the right to determine “their internal and external political status, without external influence” and this included their right to “belong or not to belong to international organizations.”<sup>311</sup> Consistent with Brezhnev's original goals of recognizing post-World War II boundaries, they agreed to “regard as inviolable all one another's

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<sup>308</sup> Kissinger, “Secretary Kissinger's News Conference of July 25,” CSCE, Helsinki, Finland, 25 July 1975.

<sup>309</sup> “Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: Final Act,” *The Department of State Bulletin*, 323.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 324 and 325.



frontiers” and agreed to “refrain now and in the future from assaulting those frontiers.”<sup>312</sup>

However, they further agreed that frontiers could be changed only by “peaceful means and by agreement” and agreed to refrain from the use of “threat or force” against each other.<sup>313</sup> With this agreement, the Soviet Union essentially revoked the Brezhnev Doctrine. With regard to military matters, the nations agreed to pursue efforts that would reduce the likelihood of confrontation. They agreed to pursue disarmament and agreed to notify each other of military maneuvers.<sup>314</sup>

Perhaps the most radical agreements in Basket One were those regarding human rights. For the first time, nations from the East and West jointly agreed in writing to respect fundamental human rights. The nations agreed to respect “freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.”<sup>315</sup> Additionally, they agreed to uphold the principles held in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>316</sup> When this U.N. document was originally developed in 1948, the Soviet Union had abstained from signing it. In an attempt to protect himself from internal accountability on these rights, Brezhnev had assured the inclusion of the right to non-intervention in internal affairs. In this clause, the nations agreed to “refrain from any intervention, direct or indirect, individual or collective, in the internal or external affairs falling within the domestic jurisdiction of another participating state.”<sup>317</sup> What Ford and the West believed would preserve a degree of independence for the Eastern European satellites, Brezhnev believed would enable him to ignore upholding human rights internally.

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<sup>312</sup> “Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: Final Act,” *The Department of State Bulletin*, 324.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

Basket Two focused on economic cooperation and was entitled “Cooperation in the Field of Economics, of Science and Technology and of the Environment.” This set of agreements was essential given of the widespread economic decline of the times suffered by both Eastern and Western nations. The principle foundation of this basket was an acknowledgement that “the growing world-wide economic interdependence calls for increasingly common and effective efforts towards the solution of major world economic problems” and that “cooperation in these fields would promote economic and social progress and the improvement of the conditions of life.”<sup>318</sup> First, the nations agreed to promote the expansion of mutual trade. To do this, they agreed to “improve conditions for the expansion of contacts” between organizations including corporations and banks.<sup>319</sup> Furthermore, they agreed to share “economic and commercial information,” as well as encourage effective marketing, industrial development, and technological development.<sup>320</sup> Finally, they agreed to jointly promote the “protection and improvement of the environment” as they pursued these economic endeavors.<sup>321</sup> Just as the first basket advanced peace as a mutually beneficial goal, the second advanced economic improvement as a mutually beneficial goal.

Basket Three focused on the advancement of human rights and was entitled “Cooperation in Humanitarian and Other Fields.” The foundational principle of this basket was the goal of “strengthening of peace and understanding among peoples” and the acknowledgment of the need to pursue this goal by facilitating “freer movement and contacts, individually and collectively, whether privately or officially, among persons, institutions and organizations of the participating

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<sup>318</sup> “Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: Final Act,” *The Department of State Bulletin*, 329.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 331 and 333.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

States.”<sup>322</sup> The first set of agreements regarded the increase of human contacts. The states agreed to promote reunification of families, enable freer travel, promote contact among young people, and encourage sport competitions across their borders.<sup>323</sup> The second set of agreements regarded the freer exchange of information. The states agreed to promote increased exchange of oral, printed, filmed, and broadcast information.<sup>324</sup> This included agreement to promote “increased cooperation among mass media organizations” as well as to “improve the conditions under which journalists from one participating State exercise their profession in another participating State.”<sup>325</sup> These agreements had heretofore been completely incongruous with Communist ideology.

Basket Four provided the means for ensuring the Final Act agreements would live on beyond the Helsinki Conference and was entitled “Follow Up to the Conference.” This basket established procedures to allow the participants to review compliance and hold each other accountable for compliance to their agreements. Kissinger stated that this basket “provides for unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral actions designed to carry forward the work of the conference and monitor the implementation of agreed texts.”<sup>326</sup> Specifically, participants were called upon to “declare their resolve, in the period following the Conference, to pay due regard to and implement the provisions of the Final Act of the Conference.”<sup>327</sup> To achieve this objective, they agreed to a meeting in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1977.<sup>328</sup> This important basket gave the document its teeth and illustrated the commitment of each participatory state.

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<sup>322</sup> “Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: Final Act,” *The Department of State Bulletin*, 339.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 340-341.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

<sup>326</sup> Kissinger to Ford, Memorandum, Helsinki, Finland, 30 July 1975, 5- 6.

<sup>327</sup> Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: Final Act,” *The Department of State Bulletin*, 348.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

President Ford was proud of the accomplishments made during his administration's negotiations of the Helsinki accords. He believed the Final Act greatly favored the Western alliance. He supported the political agreements of the peaceful settlement of disputes, the right to self-determination, and greater human rights in the form of freer movement of people and ideas across borders. Additionally, he supported the agreement for greater trade between the signatory nations during a time of global economic crisis. Ford was delighted with this outcome stating, "We are getting public commitment by the leaders of the more closed and controlled countries to a greater measure of freedom and movement for individuals, information, and ideas than has existed there in the past and establishing a yard stick by which the world can measure how well they live up to these stated intentions."<sup>329</sup> Jose A. Cabranes, an authority on international law and vice president of the International League for Human Rights, further concurred with Ford's positive assessment and said, "Careful reading of the Helsinki [documents] will confirm that the Soviet Union did not achieve its principal objectives."<sup>330</sup> With its agreement on the peaceful settlement of frontiers, the Final Act "did not endorse the Brezhnev Doctrine."<sup>331</sup> He further stated, "The Soviet bloc did not obtain a surrogate World War II peace treaty" or a "commitment to the immutability of present frontiers."<sup>332</sup> Nor did the United States, Britain, and France concede their rights in Germany.<sup>333</sup>

In contrast to Ford's buoyant assessment of the Final Act, Brezhnev and the Soviet leaders of the Politburo were angered by the outcome of the negotiations. Brezhnev had aspired to use the Helsinki Final Act to build his image as global peace maker, to force the West to

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<sup>329</sup> Ford, "European Security Conference Discussed by President Ford," Speech, Washington, D.C, 25 July 1975, *The Department of State Bulletin*, 205.

<sup>330</sup> Qtd., Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 306.

<sup>331</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 306.

<sup>332</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 306.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

acknowledge the borders for which the Soviet Union had suffered to acquire, and to quell internal dissent.<sup>334</sup> The inviolability of frontiers and the non-intervention into internal affairs agreements in Basket One were viewed as key elements toward those aspirations. However, after having entrusted the final negotiations to Gromyko, Brezhnev and the Politburo were shocked by the human rights concessions. These leaders “had grave doubts about assuming international commitments that could open the way to foreign interference” in internal Soviet affairs and engaged in serious debate over whether Brezhnev should sign the document.<sup>335</sup> According to Dobrynin, “the dispute continued until the very opening of the ceremony.”<sup>336</sup> Ultimately, Brezhnev supported Gromyko’s argument that “the main goal for the Soviet Union . . . had been the general recognition of postwar boundaries” and the human rights principles were of little consequence because with the non-interference clause, “We are still masters in our own house.”<sup>337</sup>

### ***Ford’s Helsinki Conference Leadership: Courage to Attend in the Face of Opposition***

President Ford’s decision to shift from tolerant appeasement to proactive leadership with the Soviet Union during the Final Act negotiations certainly demanded a certain measure of courage. However, it was his decision to attend the conference in Helsinki in the face of tremendous opposition that demanded the kind of courage he had developed throughout his career. The nation’s burgeoning neo-isolationist sentiment manifested itself in strong popular opposition to Helsinki Conference. Opposition came from Congress, the media, and the public.

Congressional opposition was predictable given the power shift to the legislative branch and came from both Democrats and Republicans. Democratic opponents on one extreme

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<sup>334</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 188.

<sup>335</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 345.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

<sup>337</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 346.

believed the Helsinki accords “put a seal of approval on the political division of Europe” since the incorporation of the Baltic nations into the Soviet Union “by military action in World War II.”<sup>338</sup> Democratic Senator Henry Jackson subscribed to this opinion and accused Ford of “taking us backward, not forward, in the genuine search for peace” while publically urging not to attend the conference.<sup>339</sup> Conservatives were furious about this as well, comparing it to the 1944 Yalta Conference, where it was believed that President Roosevelt had betrayed Eastern Europe to the Soviets.<sup>340</sup> Republican opponents on the other extreme believed the Helsinki accords were meaningless because they were only unenforceable principles. They worried, however, that the principles might result in an allied weakening of defense against the Soviet Union. They feared the Helsinki accords would make “free governments of Western Europe and North America less wary and lead to a letting down of NATO’s political guard and military defenses.”<sup>341</sup> Even Dobrynin acknowledged the Ford Administration’s support of the Helsinki accords was being criticized by Congress as “excessive tolerance to Moscow, and Communism in general” that signaled “détente was benefiting the Soviet Union and not the United States.”<sup>342</sup>

The cynical media of the time supported this collective congressional opposition. The New York Times declared the Helsinki accords “misguided and meaningless.”<sup>343</sup> Herb Kaplow of ABC stated, “As far as the U.S. foreign policy formulators are concerned, this is an opportunity we could have missed.”<sup>344</sup> *The Wall Street Journal* was more blunt and ran an article with a headline that read: “Jerry Don’t Go.”<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Ford, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, D.C., 25 July 1975, 2.

<sup>339</sup> Qtd., Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 300.

<sup>340</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 296.

<sup>341</sup> Ford, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, D.C., 25 July 1975, 5.

<sup>342</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 348.

<sup>343</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 300.

<sup>344</sup> Qtd., “Wednesday Evening TV, Papers, Wires,” Memorandum, Helsinki, Finland, 31 July 1975, 4.

<sup>345</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 297.

While Ford expected such congressional opposition, he failed to anticipate the equally strong public opposition. When he reviewed his mail, he discovered he had received “558 letters against the Helsinki agreement and only thirty-two in favor of it.”<sup>346</sup> Ford admitted that he did not foresee “the outrage that the trip would provoke among Americans of Eastern European descent.”<sup>347</sup> One vocal provocateur that sparked this opposition was the exiled Soviet dissident, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn who issued a strong statement condemning Helsinki saying, “The president will shortly be leaving for Europe to sign . . . the betrayal of Eastern Europe – to acknowledge officially its slavery forever. Had I the hope of dissuading him from signing the treaty, I myself would seek such a meeting. However, there is no such hope.”<sup>348</sup> Americans of East European descent expressed similar concerns. The Nationalities Council in Ford’s own state of Michigan called an emergency session of members representing Polish, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Slovak, Croatian, Hungarian, Albanian, Latvian, Estonian, and Bylorussian people to discuss their objection. They sent Ford an urgent and heartfelt mailgram expressing their concern that the Helsinki accords solidify Russia’s hegemony over Eastern Europe and appease Soviet subjugation of its citizens. They forthrightly stated, “We are alarmed at the news of your planned presence at Helsinki. Your trip brings back the memory of the trip that Mr. Roosevelt [sic] to Yalta.”<sup>349</sup> They continued, “The consequence of that trip lingers with us to this day.”<sup>350</sup> They further reminded Ford, “America has the responsibility for maintaining world peace which however cannot be obtained by bowing to the wishes of the Kremlin and imprisonment of millions of human beings” who are “living under Russian tyranny.”<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 301.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>348</sup> Solzhenitsyn, Statement, 21 July 1975.

<sup>349</sup> Nationalities Council of Michigan to Ford, Mailgram, 23 July 1975.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*

In light of this public and congressional outrage, President Ford invited representatives of Eastern European communities, along with their Representatives, to meet with him the day before his planned departure for Helsinki. The members of this group candidly expressed their concerns to Ford. Mr. Joseph Lesawry, President of the Ukrainian National Association, stated, “Mr. President we are concerned about the dissidents in the Soviet Union.”<sup>352</sup> Dr. Lev Dobrianski, the President of the Ukrainian-American Congress, warned that, “Moscow is going to make Helsinki a prime propaganda tool – they are going to make use of it.”<sup>353</sup> Representative Edward Derwinski spoke for his constituents stating, “They are fearful that [the Helsinki accords] are giving up the rights of millions who are struggling to make sure they have their freedom.”<sup>354</sup> Ford listened to these arguments almost without interruption.

Ford defended his decision to attend the conference and articulated his rationale to this group. First, he justified the Helsinki Conference as a mission of peace. He stated, “The Helsinki Conference is linked with our overall policy of working to reduce East-West tensions and pursuing peace.”<sup>355</sup> Although this was primarily a European initiative, Ford believed American participation was essential to the maintenance of strong NATO alliances. He stated, “Our absence would have caused serious imbalance for the West.”<sup>356</sup> Second, he assured the group that the Helsinki accords advance the human rights of the Eastern European people. He informed them that through the Helsinki agreements, “We were getting the public commitment by the leaders of the more closed and controlled countries to a greater measure of freedom and movement for individuals, information, and ideas.”<sup>357</sup> Finally, he affirmed his stance on the quest

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<sup>352</sup> Ford, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, D.C., 25 July 1975, 3.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>355</sup> Ford, Memorandum of Conversation, Prepared Remarks, Washington, D.C., 25 July 1975, 19.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 16.



for independence of the Baltic States. He stated, “We continued to support the Eastern European peoples in their aspirations for more freedom. The United States had never recognized the Soviet incorporation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia and was not doing so now. No territory acquired in violation of international law would be recognized as legal, and the United States would not compromise this long-standing principle.”<sup>358</sup> He concluded with this belief that, “If it all fails, Europe would be no worse off than it is now. If it succeeds . . . the people in Eastern Europe will be that much better off.”<sup>359</sup>

Despite this overwhelming opposition, President Ford decided to attend the Helsinki Conference. He had listened to his opponent’s arguments and leveraged his collaborative relationship building strengths to compassionately argue his rationale for the visible leadership he intended to assert in Helsinki based on his beliefs in internationalism and peace through strength. Ford reflected on his decision saying, “I have always thought that the responsibility of a leader was to lead. If journeying anywhere offered the chance of strengthening prospects for peace and bettering America’s position in the world, I would embark on it.”<sup>360</sup> And while Ford was certainly not pleased with *The Wall Street Journal’s* ‘Jerry Don’t Go’ headline he said, “I would rather read that than headlines all over Europe saying ‘United States Boycotts Peace Hopes.’”<sup>361</sup>

Once Ford declared his intent to attend the Helsinki Conference, some leaders acknowledged the courage inherent in the decision. Representative Dan Rostenkowski said, “This is a courageous step on your part to bring these people together. I know there are reports of people not being happy about your making this trip, but the fact that you have brought us

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<sup>358</sup> Ford, Memorandum of Conversation, Prepared Remarks, Washington, D.C., 25 July 1975, 13.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>360</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 301.

<sup>361</sup> Ford, Memorandum of Conversation, Prepared Remarks, Washington, D.C., 25 July 1975, 23.

together and have pointed out that you are president and working in search of peace and that you will not be closing the door by going there is important.”<sup>362</sup> Similarly, Dr. Kazys Bobelis, the President of the Lithuanian-American Council encouraged Ford’s decision and stated, “We are happy with the statement you have made; we believe in you. You are a champion of freedom and human rights.”<sup>363</sup> Even Brezhnev acknowledged Ford’s courage and expressed his gratitude saying, “And I appreciated very highly the fact that you came despite criticism in the U.S.”<sup>364</sup>

### ***Ford’s Helsinki Conference Leadership: Personal Diplomacy***

Having successfully completed the negotiations of the Final Act and made the difficult decision to attend, Ford planned his strategy for asserting his leadership at the Helsinki Conference itself. Based on his strength of collaborative relationship building, one important strategy was visible personal diplomacy. This included an intensive and comprehensive schedule of meetings with NATO allies, Eastern bloc leaders, and Soviet leaders. His objectives were to assure NATO allies of America’s commitment to international leadership, to bolster Eastern bloc leaders with his personal support for their independence, and to advance the peace process with the Soviet Union through détente.

Ford’s top priority on his Helsinki Conference trip was to meet with his NATO allies. Given America’s troubled economy and the abrupt change in leadership as a result of Nixon’s resignation, President Ford knew it was imperative to assure his allies that America would continue to lead in world affairs. He chose first to address NATO military personnel at the Kirschgoens base in Germany. “It is not by accident, let me assure you, that I stopped here first to consult with our Allies, nor that I now affirm our commitment to Berlin,” he said to the

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<sup>362</sup> Qtd., Ford, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, D.C., 25 July 1975, 5.

<sup>363</sup> Qtd., Ibid., 5.

<sup>364</sup> Ford and Brezhnev, Memorandum of Conversation, Helsinki, Finland, 30 July 1975, 14.

troops.<sup>365</sup> He firmly stated his commitment to his belief in peace through strength. He declared “As we pursue peace together . . . I am convinced that under present circumstances the best guarantee for peace is a very, very strong defense.”<sup>366</sup> And though in just a few days he intended to discuss mutual balanced force reductions with Brezhnev, he committed to maintaining a strong defense. He promised the troops, “I will not allow our armed forces to be weakened under any circumstances.”<sup>367</sup>

After confirming his commitment to peace through strength at the NATO military meeting, Ford met with the allied heads of state to confirm America’s leadership responsibilities in world affairs. In those meetings, he led discussions focused on restoring economic strength, achieving peace, and advancing human rights. To Federal German Chancellor Schmidt he agreed to economic cooperation. He stated, “We fully recognize that the economy of the United States is an integral part of the economy throughout the world, and particularly that of Western Europe” and agreed “that it is vitally important that the economic policies of Germany and the European Community be integrated with our own economic policies.”<sup>368</sup> Chancellor Schmidt welcomed this assertive American leadership stating, “Overcoming this worldwide recession is only possible if the most important economy of the Western world leads the way.”<sup>369</sup> Ford also celebrated the humanitarian and self-determination achievements of the Helsinki accords with his allies. To Chancellor Schmidt he expressed, “I am especially hopeful that the humanitarian contents of the Helsinki documents relating to increased contact among peoples will have special

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<sup>365</sup> Ford, “President’s Remarks to U.S. and F.R.G. Troop Picnic,” Speech, Kirschgoens, Federal Republic of Germany, 27 July 1975, 13.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>368</sup> Ford and Schmidt “Remarks by President Ford and Federal German Chancellor Schmidt.” Speech, Bonn, Federal Republic of Germany, 27 July 1975, *Department of State Bulletin*, 290 and 291.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

meaning for all the German people – East and West – including our friends in Berlin.”<sup>370</sup> To Federal German President Scheel, Ford declared, “Few people are more united than Americans and Germans in their support of the principles of independence, freedom, and self-determination.”<sup>371</sup> Schmidt expressed his appreciation of Ford’s visible leadership at the Helsinki Conference. He declared, “The negotiations have shown – and your presence in Helsinki, Mr. President, will impressively demonstrate to the entire world – that America and Europe are inseparably linked.”<sup>372</sup>

Beyond his meetings with West German leaders, Ford invested in personal diplomacy with British Prime Minister Harold Wilson, British Secretary of Foreign Affairs James Callahan, and French President Giscard d’Estaing. These discussions celebrated allied commitment to security and human rights. In a letter to Wilson Ford reflected, “Our participation in the Helsinki Conference not only contributed to a more responsible relationship with the East but also demonstrated Western solidarity and commitment to the cause of human rights.”<sup>373</sup> Callahan respected Ford’s character and stated that, “Ford always spoke with straightforward sincerity, simplicity, and integrity. Quickly I learned he meant what he said and would stand by it.”<sup>374</sup> During the discussions, Callahan remarked that as a result of the Helsinki accords, “No Soviet government can ever justify invasion again.”<sup>375</sup> Ford responded with an invitation to jointly advance mutual arms reductions.<sup>376</sup> Ford’s personal diplomacy had assured America’s allies that

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<sup>370</sup> Ford and Schmidt, “Remarks by President Ford and Federal German Chancellor Schmidt.” Speech, Bonn, Federal Republic of Germany, 27 July 1975, *Department of State Bulletin*, 290 and 291.

<sup>371</sup> Ford and Scheel, “Toast by President Ford and Federal German President Scheel,” Bonn, Federal Republic of Germany, 27 July 1975, *Department of State Bulletin*, 295.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>373</sup> Ford to Wilson, Letter, Undated.

<sup>374</sup> Qtd., Cannon, *Time and Chance*, 400.

<sup>375</sup> Ford and Wilson, Memorandum of Conversation, 30 July 1975, Helsinki, Finland, 3.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

the United States remained firmly committed to uphold its global leadership responsibilities under his administration.

In addition to the personal diplomacy he conducted with his allies as part of his Helsinki trip, President Ford conducted visible and historic meetings with heads of three important Eastern European states. The purpose of these visible meetings was to encourage their independence from the Soviet Union.<sup>377</sup> To accomplish this goal, he chose Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia because he said they were the “three Eastern European states that were the least subservient to Moscow.”<sup>378</sup> He publically declared at his departure, “I hope my visits to Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia will again demonstrate our continuing friendship and interest in the welfare and progress of the fine people of Eastern Europe.”<sup>379</sup> This strategy was historic in that it was the first time that the leader of a democratic country had visited these parts of Eastern Europe.<sup>380</sup>

Ford’s first visit was to Poland for a conference with Polish First Secretary Edward Gierek. Their discussion centered on improving the prospects of peace, economic growth, and increased human rights through bi-lateral efforts. Gierek warmly welcomed Ford and praised his personal diplomacy efforts saying, “You sir, are personally the advocate of friendly cooperation of our peoples and states. Your present visit to Poland is about the most eloquent testimony of that.”<sup>381</sup> President Ford openly encouraged Poland to seek greater independent relations with the United States. He said, “I am deeply gratified by the expansion of contacts between our two countries, by the rapid growth in trade, and by the new forms of bilateral cooperation which have

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<sup>377</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 299.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>379</sup> Ford, Memorandum of Conversation, Prepared Remarks, Washington, D.C., 25 July 1975, 8.

<sup>380</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 298.

<sup>381</sup> Ford and Gierek, “Arrival, Warsaw, July 28,” Warsaw, Poland, 28 July 1975, *Department of State Bulletin*, 295-296.

been able to develop between our two nations.”<sup>382</sup> He continued this encouragement in another meeting by invoking principles of the Helsinki accords both would soon sign saying, “I am pleased to cite the continuing efforts of both sides to increase trade and commerce, the visits and exchanges between our scientists” that result in “more Poles and Americans to know each other and exchange ideas.”<sup>383</sup> In a joint statement, Ford and Gierek expressed their agreement to support military détente as an important step toward peace, increased trade as an important step toward economic health, and “efforts to solve humanitarian problems affecting their citizens.”<sup>384</sup> Importantly, they openly agreed to support the Helsinki Conference on Security and Exchange in Europe so that the agreements “become genuine and strong stimulus for positively shaping” their relationship.<sup>385</sup>

Ford’s second East European visit was to Yugoslavia for a meeting with President Josip Broz Tito. Their discussions centered on increasing European security through arms reduction and increasing economic trade. Leveraging his collaborative relationship building strength, Ford openly asked for Tito’s advice on achieving peace through arms reduction. In a confident statement that revealed the independence of his thinking, Tito stated, “I think that after Helsinki the moral factor will become important.”<sup>386</sup> He further stated, “I think there is a connection between the reduction of arms and Helsinki. Otherwise we haven’t done much.”<sup>387</sup> Ford then appealed to Tito’s independent stance and asserted, “We think dividing the world into blocs is not the best way to deal with the problems. In the kind of world we live in today, there can’t be

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<sup>382</sup> Ford and Gierek, “Arrival, Warsaw, July 28,” Warsaw, Poland, 28 July 1975, *Department of State Bulletin*, 296.

<sup>383</sup> Ford and Gierek, “Toasts by President Ford and First Secretary Gierek,” Speech, Warsaw, Poland, 28 July 1975, 299.

<sup>384</sup> “Joint Statement Signed at Warsaw July 28,” *The Department of State Bulletin*, 300-301.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>386</sup> Ford and Tito, Memorandum of Conversation, 3 August, 1975, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 2.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

the kind of confrontation and military activity which took place in your time and mine.”<sup>388</sup> To achieve peace, Ford promised, “I will dedicate myself to eliminating those sources of conflict that could lead to military confrontation.”<sup>389</sup> As in the Polish discussion, Ford and the Yugoslav leaders discussed mutual economic opportunities. The Yugoslavs raised their need for an infusion of capital investment and their belief that the U.S. could be their biggest source.<sup>390</sup> Ford responded affirmatively that he had been impressed by Yugoslavian economic policy and that he believed that such investment could help with the United States’ recession.<sup>391</sup> In a joint statement, Ford and Tito expressed their strong mutual support of key Helsinki principles including “the maintenance of peace and stability by the peaceful settlement of disputes, and by adherence to the principles of independence, mutual respect and full equality of sovereign states.”<sup>392</sup>

Ford’s third Eastern European visit was to Romania for meetings with President Nicolae Ceausescu. Understanding the strong influence the Soviet Union aspired to hold over Romania, President Ford lost no time underscoring Romania’s sovereignty. In his arrival statement, he stated, “Among the principles we both cherish is the right of every nation to independence and sovereignty. We believe that every nation has the right to its own peaceful existence, without being threatened by force. And we believe that all states are equal under law regardless of size, system or level of development.”<sup>393</sup> Ford and Ceausescu’s discussions focused on peace through enforcement of the Helsinki non-interference agreement and the expansion of trade. Unlike his Polish counterpart, Ceausescu openly expressed bitterness to Soviet interference with Romania.

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<sup>388</sup> Ford and Tito, Memorandum of Conversation, 3 August, 1975, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 4.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>392</sup> Ford and Tito, “Joint Statement,” 4 August 1975, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 2.

<sup>393</sup> Ford, “Arrival Statement,” Speech, Meeting with Ceausescu, Bucharest, Romania, 2 August, 1975, 3.

At Ford's request, Ceausescu showed him a map illustrating the territories Romania had lost to the Soviets.<sup>394</sup> Ceausescu angrily stated, "Romania in some ways fared better at Hitler's hands."<sup>395</sup> He complained that the Russians had never returned the gold bullion sent to Moscow for protection.<sup>396</sup> Ford acknowledged Ceausescu's concerns over the Helsinki agreement and invited him to share his views. Ceausescu expressed his belief that peace was at risk in Europe as long as the United States, France, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union occupied Germany. He stated, "To continue to live under the aegis of the Potsdam Treaty means the risk of intervention at any moment. This is the essential problem."<sup>397</sup> He believed peace required invoking the Helsinki principle of sovereign equality and "putting every state involved on equal footing including Germany."<sup>398</sup> He went on to boldly recommend German reunification as the vital step in securing European security. He stated that it was essential to eliminate "the Potsdam status" would "exclude such a right of intervention in the right of intervention in the internal affairs of other states."<sup>399</sup> Despite the apparent audacity of this proposal, Ford acknowledged the potential of this idea responding, "I welcome real peace in Europe" and acknowledged "We need to have as many alternatives as possible."<sup>400</sup> Kissinger prophetically asserted that "knowing the Germans he could believe they might succeed in uniting in 15 years."<sup>401</sup>

Mutual trade expansion between the United States and Romania seemed to be a more attainable goal in the short term. Ford encouraged this expansion saying, "We are overjoyed with

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<sup>394</sup> Ford, Kissinger, and Ceausescu, Memorandum of Conversation, Bucharest-Sinaia Train, 3 August 1975, 14-15.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>397</sup> Ford, Kissinger, and Ceausescu, Memorandum of Conversation, Bucharest, Romania, 2 August 1975, 7.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>401</sup> Ford, Kissinger, and Ceausescu, Memorandum of Conversation, Bucharest-Sanaia Train, Romania, 3 August 1975, 14.



the opportunity to expand our trade. It is of great benefit for each country.”<sup>402</sup> He furthermore built bridges across the socialist and capitalist ideologies. He stated, “I fully recognize that economic problems are equally serious whether they are in a capitalist state or socialist state because they lead to human suffering. . . . I can see why there should be a higher degree of cooperation between capitalist and socialist societies.”<sup>403</sup> Collectively, the personal diplomacy Ford conducted in Poland, Yugoslavia, and Romania advanced the principles of peace, self-determination, economic expansion, and human rights espoused in the Helsinki accords and fostered independent bilateral relations between the United States and the nations of Eastern Europe.

Although tensions had arisen as a result of the fall-out from the Trade Reform Act denying the Soviet Union Most Favored Nation status, Ford executed his strategy of personal diplomacy in two lengthy meetings with Soviet leaders at Helsinki. In a joint press conference at the start of the CSCE, Ford and Brezhnev expressed their mutual hope that the conference would result in a more peaceful world. Ford said, “I believe that the peace in Europe will be enhanced” and “the overall peace of the world would be encouraged and broadened.”<sup>404</sup> Similarly, Brezhnev said, “I want peace and tranquility to reign in Europe” and he adamantly added his desire that the nations of Europe not “interfere in each other’s domestic affairs.”<sup>405</sup> To advance this peace, discussions between the two leaders centered on mutual balanced force reductions and progress toward a SALT II agreement. At their first meeting, Ford took the initiative and affirmed his commitment to halting the arms race. In a conciliatory declaration he stated, “I can tell you very

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<sup>402</sup> Ford, Kissinger, and Ceausescu, Memorandum of Conversation, Bucharest, Romania, 2 August 1975, 1.

<sup>403</sup> Ford, Kissinger, and Ceausescu, Memorandum of Conversation, Sinaia-Bucharest Train, 2 August 1975, 30-31.

<sup>404</sup> Ford and Brezhnev, “Question and Answer Session,” Remarks, Helsinki, Finland, 30 July 1975, 2.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

forcefully I am committed to détente, and the American people agree with me.”<sup>406</sup> He further stated, “I am confident as we talk about SALT II, we can achieve success in that area.”<sup>407</sup>

Brezhnev agreed and believed the scope of their discussions should be expanded. He said, “We completed the European Security Conference. But we should not stop at that. Relaxation of tensions doesn’t stop with Europe, the U.S., and Canada.”<sup>408</sup> Furthermore, Brezhnev affirmed, “We have an agreement on the prevention of nuclear war. We both pledged to act in such a way as to prevent a nuclear war between us.”<sup>409</sup> He even stated, “After this conference, it is morally more difficult to talk about increasing our armaments levels.”<sup>410</sup>

Despite this agreement on their joint commitment to détente and the importance of preventing military escalation, their meeting resulted in little progress toward a SALT II agreement. The Soviets granted a minor concession, agreeing that under the assumptions of missile counting, any missile placed in a MIRV location was a missile that had that capability.<sup>411</sup> And a tentative agreement was reached that limited airborne cruise missiles to 1,850 miles and submarine-based missiles to 375 miles.<sup>412</sup> Ultimately however, the meetings in Helsinki concluded with a tense disagreement over the capabilities of the Soviet Backfire bomber.<sup>413</sup> Both sides were forced to conclude that they were not anywhere near a SALT II agreement.<sup>414</sup>

However, Ford’s personal diplomacy was successful in negotiating an economic agreement. Europe and the Soviet Union in particular had suffered from a poor wheat harvest. In a top secret deal during their Helsinki meetings, Brezhnev agreed to a significant grain purchase

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<sup>406</sup> Ford and Brezhnev, Memorandum of Conversation, Helsinki, Finland, 30 July 1975, 3-4.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>410</sup> Ford and Brezhnev, Memorandum of Conversation, Helsinki, Finland, 2 August 1975, 2.

<sup>411</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 303.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid., 304-305.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid., 305-306.

from the United States. In their final meeting, he said, “I want to say a few words on grain. You said you had no problem with the purchase of 10 million tons, but that this should not be made public.”<sup>415</sup> Ford confirmed that there would be no problem. Brezhnev stunningly responded, “I realized that we have already bought 10 million, but we are prepared to go further and to purchase another 15 million.”<sup>416</sup> Although Ford was unable to negotiate progress on SALT II, his economic grain deal helped to preserve his relationship with Brezhnev. Brezhnev expressed his support for Ford’s future political success. He confided, “I wish to tell you something confidentially and completely frankly that we in the Soviet leadership are supporters of your election as president to a new term as well. And we for our part will do everything we can to make that happen.”<sup>417</sup> The collaborative relationship building strengths Ford had built as a Cold War hawk during his congressional career had enabled him to win the approval of his Soviet counterpart.

### ***Ford’s Helsinki Conference Leadership: Speech to the Heads of State***

To complement his strategy of personal diplomacy, Ford’s second leadership strategy at the Helsinki Conference was to deliver a strong personal message in a candid and authentic speech with integrity. Ford was never regarded as an engaging public speaker. However, he was at his best when he spoke from the foundation of his principles. His speech at the Helsinki Conference represented such an opportunity. The speech was important as it would be the most public display of this leadership at the conference. Kissinger told Ford his speech “will command worldwide attention.”<sup>418</sup> Ford was disappointed with the tone of the first draft of his speech. As he pondered the accomplishments of the Helsinki accords, he decided that the overriding

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<sup>415</sup> Ford and Brezhnev, Memorandum of Conversation, Helsinki, Finland, 2 August 1975, 1.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>417</sup> Ford and Brezhnev, “Private Conversation,” Memorandum of Conversation, 30 July 1975, 1.

<sup>418</sup> Kissinger to Ford, Memorandum, “Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe,” 30 June 1975, 1.

objective of his speech would be to provide hope. He wrote in the margin of his draft, “Our people of all 35 countries want us to offer them hope. Their hopes have been raised by bilateral agreements but that Hope can be expanded, yes multiplied, by words at Helsinki and actions to implement and execute.”<sup>419</sup> Finally, he scribbled, “Why not amplify HOPE which all want and put our actions aimed at that achievement.”<sup>420</sup> He double underlined HOPE.

Ford delivered his speech on August 1, 1975 before the 34 other heads of state in attendance at the Helsinki Conference. He was twenty-sixth in the long schedule of speakers. He first began his Hope speech with an articulation of the participating nation’s dual needs for independence and lasting peace. He said, “We are bound together by the most powerful of ties, our fervent love for freedom and independence, which knows no homeland but the human heart.”<sup>421</sup> But he acknowledged that this was difficult. He continued, “The nations assembled here have kept the general peace in Europe for thirty years, yet there have been too many narrow escapes from major conflict. There remains, to this day, the urgent issue of how to construct a just and lasting peace for all peoples.”<sup>422</sup> The solution, he said, was to shift from confrontation to cooperation. We must move “away from confrontation and toward new possibilities for secure and mutually beneficial cooperation.”<sup>423</sup> He pledged America’s partnership in this cooperative endeavor saying, “I have come to Helsinki as a spokesman for a nation whose vision has always been forward, whose people have always demanded that the future be brighter than the past, and

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<sup>419</sup> Ford, “Remarks of the President of the United States before the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe,” Handwritten Notes, Helsinki, Finland, 1 August 1975.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Ford, “Remarks of the President of the United States before the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe,” Speech, Helsinki, Finland, 1 August 1975, 2.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 5.

whose united will and purpose at this hour is to work diligently to promote peace and progress not only for ourselves but for all mankind.”<sup>424</sup>

Second, Ford asserted that the promotion of peace required discipline and restraint in the relationships of the participating nations. He stated his belief that “Military competition must be controlled.”<sup>425</sup> Furthermore he stated, “Political competition must be constrained. Crises must not be manipulated or exploited for unilateral advantages.”<sup>426</sup> He declared his belief that the Helsinki accords offered a strong blueprint for this type of discipline. He said, “The documents produced here . . . reaffirm the basic principles of relations between states: non-intervention, sovereign equality, self-determination, territorial integrity, inviolability of frontiers and the possibility of change by peaceful means.”<sup>427</sup> He warned this could not be the work of one nation as “Détente must be a two-way street. Tensions cannot be eased by one side alone. Both sides must want détente and work to achieve it. Both sides must benefit from it.”<sup>428</sup>

Third, Ford articulated the benefits of such peaceful and cooperative relationships in the form of enhanced human rights. He said, “The documents produced here . . . affirm the most fundamental human rights, liberty of thought, conscience and faith, the exercise of civil and political rights.”<sup>429</sup> Ford applauded the Helsinki agreement for the free movement of people and ideas with things like, “Cultural and educational exchange, family reunification, the right to travel and to marriage between nationals of different states – and for the protection of the priceless heritage of our diverse cultures.”<sup>430</sup> To drive the point home to the Communist nations, Ford stated, “To the countries of the East . . . it is important that you recognize the deep devotion

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<sup>424</sup> Ford, “Remarks of the President of the United States before the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe,” Speech, Helsinki, Finland, 1 August 1975, 6.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

of the American people and their government to human rights and fundamental freedoms and thus to the pledges that this conference has made regarding the freer movement of people, ideas, and information.”<sup>431</sup>

Fourth, Ford articulated the benefits of peaceful and cooperative relationships in the form of economic free- exchange. Ford invoked his presence as indicative of America’s interest in Europe’s future. He said, “Our future is bound with yours. Our economic well-being as well as our security is linked increasingly with yours.”<sup>432</sup> Ford stressed each of the facets of possible cooperation coming out of Helsinki from trade and industry to science and technology from the environment to space.<sup>433</sup>

Finally, and most importantly, Ford appealed to the integrity of these world leaders. He issued a challenge to the participants to keep the promises made at Helsinki. He said, “The people of all Europe, and, I assure you, the people of North America a thoroughly tired of having their hopes raised and then shattered by empty words and unfulfilled pledges. We had better say what we mean and mean what we say, or we will have the anger of our citizens to answer.”<sup>434</sup> Ford stated, “We owe it to our children, to the children of all continents, not to miss any opportunity, not to malingering for one minute, not to spare ourselves or allow others to shirk in the monumental task of building a better and safer world.”<sup>435</sup> In his determination to provide hope, Ford said, “there is now opportunity to turn our people’s hopes into realities.”<sup>436</sup> And in his most famous line from the speech Ford said, “History will judge this conference not by what we say today, but by what we do tomorrow – not by the promises we make, but by the promises we

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<sup>431</sup> Ford, “Remarks of the President of the United States before the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe,” Speech, Helsinki, Finland, 1 August 1975, 46.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 8.

keep.”<sup>437</sup> He then looked Brezhnev in the eye while driving home that, “To my country, principles are not clichés or empty phrases. We take this work and these words very seriously.”<sup>438</sup>

At the conclusion of the Helsinki Conference, President Ford was pleased with the result. He had successfully supported the negotiations of important agreements such as human rights and talks on mutually balanced force reduction. He had made the decision to attend the conference in the face of strong opposition and in so doing had leveraged his personal diplomacy to strengthen relationships with his NATO allies, Eastern European leaders, and even Brezhnev. He had asserted American global leadership with integrity in his message of hope and his call for the participants to keep the promises they made in signing the Helsinki agreements. In explaining this success to his Cabinet upon his return he said, “There has been criticism of the meeting. But it bolstered the West and gave greater sense of independence to the Eastern European countries.”<sup>439</sup> Overall, he said, “The meeting was a definite plus.”<sup>440</sup> While Ford obviously understood that the outcome of the Helsinki Conference would have to be judged in the future, he believed that, “whether it is a long stride or a short step, it is at least a forward step for freedom.”<sup>441</sup>

Kissinger concurred with Ford’s positive assessment of the Helsinki Conference. He jubilantly declared, “It was the president who dominated the Conference, who took a triumphal tour through Eastern Europe – it was the president.”<sup>442</sup> Kissinger would even say that American

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<sup>437</sup> Ford, “Remarks of the President of the United States before the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe,” Speech, Helsinki, Finland, 1 August 1975, 60.

<sup>438</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 301.

<sup>439</sup> Ford and Kissinger, Memorandum of Conversation, Cabinet Meeting, Washington, D.C., 8 August 1975, 1.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>441</sup> Ford, “President’s Departure Statement,” Washington, D.C., 26 July 1975, 6.

<sup>442</sup> Ford and Kissinger, Memorandum of Conversation, Cabinet Meeting, Washington, D.C., 8 August 1975, 2.

relations were now “better than ever since the early Marshall Plan days.”<sup>443</sup> He concluded that after the Helsinki Conference, “Anyone observing from another planet would not have thought Communism was the wave of the future.”<sup>444</sup> While this was clear to Ford and Kissinger, there were many others who did not see it this way. For all of the work that Ford had put in to preparation and attending the conference, his fight to win popular and political support for the Helsinki accords was nowhere near complete.

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<sup>443</sup> Ford and Kissinger, Memorandum of Conversation, Cabinet Meeting, Washington, D.C., 8 August 1975, 2.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



### **Chapter 3:**

#### **The Impact of Ford's Leadership at the Helsinki Conference**

President Ford attended the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and signed the Helsinki Final Act because he believed America's leadership in this international event would advance his principle of achieving peace. The impact of the Helsinki Conference on this goal varied widely in the short term and the long term. In the short term, the Helsinki Conference proved politically damaging to Ford. Ford failed to craft a message to articulate the benefits of the Final Act. As a result, his image suffered a decline in the immediate aftermath of the conference. Furthermore, the Helsinki accords proved to be a liability in the 1976 presidential election. In the primaries, challenger Ronald Reagan vocally criticized President Ford's involvement in the conference as deferential to the Soviet Union. In the general election, Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter criticized Ford for failing to advance human rights more forcefully. Ford himself allowed the conference to be a liability with a damaging mistake during the foreign policy debate where he inferred Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe in answer to a Helsinki accords question. However, Ford steadfastly held that the Helsinki Conference would have a positive impact on world peace over time. In the long run, it made an important contribution to the end of the Cold War when European leaders kept the promises their predecessors had made at Helsinki. The Final Act became a unifying motivation for East European dissidents in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union to obtain greater freedoms and rights. And after a decade and a half, the self-determination, non-interference, and human rights principles so carefully negotiated and signed in the Helsinki Final Act were invoked by world leaders to allow Germany to reunify and choose its own alliances.

### *The Helsinki Accords: Immediate Impact to Ford's Image*

At the conclusion of the Helsinki Conference, President Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger declared the event a success. In private conferences, they articulated the benefits and rationale of the Final Act and of Ford's personal diplomacy with Eastern European leaders. First, they articulated the political and human benefits. Ford explained to his Cabinet that the Final Act advanced global peace because it "specifies self-determination and peaceful change of borders."<sup>445</sup> Kissinger further stated that it held strong potential to advance human freedoms because "all the new things in the documents are in our favor – peaceful change, human contacts."<sup>446</sup> Second, they shared the benefit of the conference in improving foreign relations. In a meeting with National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, Ford declared that as a result of his presence at the conference and support of the Final Act, he had received "more overtures from Eastern European countries than ever before."<sup>447</sup> Third, they explained why the Helsinki accords did not solidify Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe. Ford reasoned to his Cabinet, that the existing "borders were settled by the treaty, most of them 30 years ago."<sup>448</sup> In a private meeting with Chinese Vice Premier Teng Hsiao-ping, Kissinger was even more precise in articulating the history of European border settlement in defense of the border inviolability agreements in the Final Act. He flatly stated, "There were no unsettled frontiers in Europe."<sup>449</sup> He explained, "The Balkan frontiers were settled in 1946-47 in the peace conference in Paris. The Eastern frontier of Poland was settled at Yalta. The Western frontier of Poland was recognized by both German

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<sup>445</sup> Ford and Kissinger, Memorandum of Conversation, Cabinet Meeting, Washington, D.C., 8 August 1975, 1.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>447</sup> Ford, Kissinger & Scowcroft, Memorandum of Conversation, 4 August 1975, 3.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>449</sup> Kissinger, Memorandum of Conversation, Peking, People's Republic of China, 20 October 1975, 16.

states.”<sup>450</sup> In private meetings, both Ford and Kissinger could clearly articulate the Helsinki Conference’s purpose and benefits.

However, the Ford administration failed to clearly and convincingly articulate the benefits of the Helsinki Conference to the public, the media, and to Congress. Having never developed the skill of communicating a compelling vision and message, Ford did not leverage his media opportunities to do so in the immediate aftermath of his Helsinki trip. Ford recalled that the “Press reaction to the speech was uniformly generous” when the Los Angeles Times praised his conference remarks as “probably Ford’s most impressive speech.”<sup>451</sup> From this praise, he concluded that his message “America still cares” had been communicated “loud and clear” to the European people.<sup>452</sup> But neither Ford nor Kissinger crafted a similarly ‘loud and clear’ message to the American people. Ford’s Helsinki Conference messages were nebulous and sweeping. At a press appearance with Brezhnev during the Conference, Ford vaguely stated, “I believe that the peace in Europe will be enhanced. I believe that the overall peace of the world will be encouraged and broadened, and it is my judgment that progress will be the net result.”<sup>453</sup> But he failed to clearly articulate how the Helsinki Final Act would accomplish that peace. In remarks to the press immediately following the conference he further vaguely stated, “I believe that some of the unfortunate things that have happened in the last 20 years in Europe will not happen again because of the signing of the CSCE and the speeches that were made there. Those kinds of unfortunate events can be avoided in the future. CSCE was a great plus.”<sup>454</sup> Finally, in his remarks to the press upon returning to the United States he stated, “We will continue to

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<sup>450</sup> Kissinger, Memorandum of Conversation, Peking, People’s Republic of China, 20 October 1975, 16.

<sup>451</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 305.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>453</sup> Ford, “Question and Answer Session,” Helsinki, Finland, 30 July 1975, 2.

<sup>454</sup> Ford, “Question and Answer Session with the President,” Air Force One, 2 August 1975, *Department of State Bulletin*, 311.

encourage full implementation of the principles embodied in the C.S.C.E. declarations until the 1977 follow-up meeting to assess how well all the signatory states have translated these principles into concrete action for the benefit of their peoples and the common progress in Europe.”<sup>455</sup> But he failed to communicate what those principles were or how the implementation would be enforced. None of these public statements convincingly articulated the benefits of the Helsinki accords in advancing peace and human freedoms, nor did they sufficiently address the direct opposition he had received from concerned parties prior to the conference.

Even Ford’s own staff portrayed Helsinki negatively. NBC’s John Cochran reported, “Mr. Ford’s aides privately admit the agreement is modest.”<sup>456</sup> Ford recalled, “The trouble was that some members of the White House staff didn’t view Helsinki as a significant accomplishment. In their comments to the press, they were defensive about it. They should have lauded the accord as a victory.”<sup>457</sup> This may have been due to Kissinger’s failure to properly brief Ford’s staff. Kissinger was convinced that the success of détente was dependent on maintaining secrecy. As a result, he did not broadly communicate Helsinki’s meaning and importance which left the staff unable to rebut criticisms of Helsinki.<sup>458</sup>

One particularly damaging staff remark was from Assistant Secretary of State Helmut Sonnenfeldt. Just five months after the Helsinki Conference, Sonnenfeldt told American diplomats in London that a “permanent organic union existed between the Soviet Union and its satellite countries.”<sup>459</sup> The comment was leaked and when it was reported it was interpreted as the Ford administration’s acknowledgement of that an enduring Soviet domination over Eastern

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<sup>455</sup> Ford, “Statement by the President,” Speech, Washington, D.C., 4 August 1975, 1.

<sup>456</sup> Qtd., “Wednesday Evening TV, Papers, Wires.” Memorandum, 31 July 1975, 5.

<sup>457</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 301.

<sup>458</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 298.

<sup>459</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 332.

Europe.<sup>460</sup> This statement was labeled by the media as the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine and it infuriated politicians and Americans of Eastern-European descent.<sup>461</sup> Sonnenfeldt later said he intended to assert that in the Ford administration's foreign policy, "We wished the Eastern Europeans would be freer and more autonomous than they were, but that there was not much we could do about it at acceptable risk."<sup>462</sup> "What pained me about it particularly," he said, "was that it caused so much pain and bad blood in communities in this country which have Eastern European roots."<sup>463</sup> Additionally he said, "Our ubiquitous friends in the KGB picked this up very quickly and used it in Eastern Europe to try to disorient and demoralize people who had placed reliance on relations with the United States."<sup>464</sup>

As a result of the communication failures of Ford and his staff, Ford faced continued severe criticism for attending the Helsinki Conference. Criticism from the media was harsh. The press argued the Helsinki Conference was either irrelevant or unnecessarily advantageous to the Soviet Union. A *New York Times* editorial scathingly stated, "Nothing signed in Helsinki will in any way save courageous free thinkers in the Soviet empire from the prospect of incarceration in forced labor camps, or in insane asylums, or from being subjected to involuntary exile."<sup>465</sup> Herb Kaplow of ABC reported, "As far as the U.S. foreign policy formulators are concerned, this is an opportunity we could have missed."<sup>466</sup> He further reported that Ford played a passive role saying, "But many of our European allies wanted this conference in varying degrees and so we appeared, with sort of a what-the-hell attitude, there's nothing to lose and maybe something to gain."<sup>467</sup>

NBC's Garrick Utley dismissed U.S. participation as deference to Brezhnev as part of détente.

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<sup>460</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 189.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>462</sup> Qtd., *The Ford Presidency: Twenty-Two Intimate Perspectives of Gerald R. Ford*, 344.

<sup>463</sup> Qtd., Ibid., 344.

<sup>464</sup> Qtd., Ibid., 344

<sup>465</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 4.

<sup>466</sup> Qtd., "Wednesday Evening TV, Papers, Wires." Memorandum, 31 July 1975, 4.

<sup>467</sup> Qtd., Ibid., 4.

He reported that Ford was signing the Helsinki accords “to humor Leonid Brezhnev. He’s had an obsession about this conference for many years.”<sup>468</sup> *Newsweek’s* Moscow Correspondent Alfred Friendly reported, “Détente gives [the Soviets] a respectability they crave” and the Helsinki agreements could be “dangerous if it permits the Russians to appear respectable when in fact they don’t have any intention of behaving respectably.”<sup>469</sup> Correspondent Howard K. Smith unabashedly blasted the Helsinki accords as both irresponsible and hypocritical. He reported, “At the end of World War II the Russians flagrantly broke the Yalta Agreement with us and seized about half of Europe. Now, euphoric at hopes of détente, we’re about to sign an agreement in Helsinki making their breach of treaty and their conquest ‘inviolable.’ It seems incongruous that while we press Israel to give up some conquered Arab lands, we bless the Russians conquest of six times as much territory.”<sup>470</sup>

Like the media, political opponents were critical of Ford’s participation at the Helsinki Conference. Both liberals and conservatives denounced Ford and Kissinger claiming that they had actually abandoned the cause of human rights.<sup>471</sup> Conservative California Governor Ronald Reagan defiantly issued an announcement saying, “I think all Americans should be against it.”<sup>472</sup> Reagan asserted his belief that Ford’s appeasement of the Soviets would weaken America’s leadership position.<sup>473</sup> Senator Henry Jackson gave a more forceful and more articulate critique of the accords, saying that Eastern Europe had been given away in exchange for human rights promises that were “so imprecise and so hedged as to raise considerable doubt about whether they can and will be seriously implemented.”<sup>474</sup> The Polish-American Congress publicly

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<sup>468</sup> Qtd., “Wednesday Evening TV, Papers, Wires.” Memorandum, 31 July 1975, 4.

<sup>469</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>470</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>471</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 189.

<sup>472</sup> Qtd., Greene, *The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford*, 153.

<sup>473</sup> Hahnimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, 437.

<sup>474</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 437.

condemned the Final Act saying that, “the Soviet Union rarely, if ever, honored treaties, and the Helsinki accords implied that Western democracies accepted Soviet domination of East Central Europe and of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.”<sup>475</sup> Even the Chinese denounced the accords claiming that the Soviets intended to use the documents to legitimize their claims in Europe and turn next to Asia.<sup>476</sup> Ford’s lack of communication skills left him ill-equipped to rebut these statements.

Without a clear, convincing message and in the face of such critical political and media opposition, Ford’s public image was damaged. Ford recalled the mail he received upon returning from Helsinki “showed 122 letters condemning the accords; only eleven letters approved of what I had done.”<sup>477</sup> Ford subsequently suffered a sharp decline in his approval ratings. According to the Sindlinger Report, Ford had an overall positive rating of 57 percent and an international positive rating of 67 percent in the two week period leading up to the Helsinki Conference.<sup>478</sup> In the two week period following the conference, Ford’s overall approval positive rating dropped six points to 51 percent and his international positive rating dropped thirteen points to only 54 percent.<sup>479</sup> Similarly, Gallup poll data showed Ford’s overall approval rating had dropped from 52 percent before the Helsinki Conference to only 45 percent after the conference.<sup>480</sup> Presidential aide George Van Cleve concluded that, “The president suffered a decline in both his overall and his international ratings during the Helsinki period, and it appears that the trip plus the pact were at least partially responsible” because the Helsinki Conference “occurred during a period of relatively favorable economic news” domestically.<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> Qtd., Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 298.

<sup>476</sup> “Wednesday Evening TV, Papers, Wires.” Memorandum, 31 July 1975, 3.

<sup>477</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 306.

<sup>478</sup> VanCleve to Gergen, Memorandum, June 1976, 5.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>480</sup> Jones, “Gerald Ford Retrospective,” Gallup News Service, 5.

<sup>481</sup> VanCleve to Gergen, “Factors Influencing Presidential Approval Ratings,” Memorandum, June 1976, 5.

The Ford administration's public relations mistakes were widely acknowledged. Ford accepted the blame for America's misunderstanding of the Helsinki accords. Ford said, "The well-meaning ethnic groups in this country simply didn't understand our accomplishment. This was not a failure in substance. It was a failure in public relations, and I will have to accept a large share of the blame."<sup>482</sup> Likewise, Kissinger acknowledged that the administration did not sufficiently respond to early criticisms of the Helsinki Conference.<sup>483</sup> He admitted to Ford that the Helsinki message was a complicated one. In a memo preparing Ford for the Conference, he wrote, "The West has a more complex story to tell: that CSCE achievements are modest, that the proof of the CSCE's success lies in the future, and that a strong Allied defense posture is a precondition for security and future détente."<sup>484</sup> Even the Soviets recognized Ford's communication failure. Dobrynin recalled, "The Ford administration never made [the Helsinki accords] clear to the American people, and his opponents exploited the resulting ambiguity in the public mind."<sup>485</sup>

The Soviets did not make the same mistake and proclaimed the Helsinki Final Act as a major victory. Kissinger acknowledged that the Soviets had a clear public relations opportunity to leverage the Helsinki agreements. In a memorandum to Ford, Kissinger wrote, "The solemnity of the occasion will favor the Soviet Union, as will the simplicity of the Soviet message – that peace has arrived."<sup>486</sup> Brezhnev agreed and zealously proclaimed the Helsinki Conference a success. Having worked for so long to advance the Conference on European Security and Cooperation, Brezhnev was quite anxious to claim a victory before the February 1976

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<sup>482</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 306.

<sup>483</sup> Compton, "A Pool Report," Bonn, Federal Republic of Germany, 28 July 1975.

<sup>484</sup> Kissinger to Ford, Memorandum, "Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe," 30 June 1975, 3.

<sup>485</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 347.

<sup>486</sup> Kissinger to Ford, Memorandum, "Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe," 30 June 1975, 3.



Communist Party Congress.<sup>487</sup> To broadly publicize his accomplishment, Brezhnev published the full text of the Helsinki Final Act in the Communist Party's newspaper, *Pravda*.<sup>488</sup> The Soviet public relations campaign was so successful a Czech dissident wrote, "The Helsinki summit has given its blessing to Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe in exchange for the hope given to the Western heads of state that the USSR will not intervene in the course of events in the West."<sup>489</sup>

Although he failed to convincingly communicate the benefits and rationale for the Helsinki accords, Ford consistently communicated his belief in its future impact. Fueled by this long term optimism, Ford defended the positive outcomes that could be obtained if the leaders acted upon principles they promised to uphold in signing the Final Act. Flying back from the conference in Air Force One he said, "I am absolutely confident, I am totally convinced, that because the 35 nations participating in the Conference on European Security and Cooperation, Europe and the world are all better off. I will know two years from now whether our promises have been kept."<sup>490</sup> Upon his return he stated with conviction, "We are on the right course and the course that offers the best hope for a better world. I will continue to steer a steady course because [the Helsinki] experience has further convinced me that millions of hopeful people, in all parts of Europe, still look to the United States of America as the champions of human freedom everywhere and of a just peace among the nations of the world."<sup>491</sup> He stressed that the proof of Helsinki's success would have to be displayed through actions. The following September, Ford said of the Helsinki agreements, "The test is performance. I am optimistic and I believe that if we keep pressure on that we can say that Helsinki was a big plus."<sup>492</sup> Ford firmly believed that the

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<sup>487</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 81.

<sup>488</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 299.

<sup>489</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 96.

<sup>490</sup> Ford, "Question and Answer Session with the President," Air Force One, 2 August 1975, *Department of State Bulletin*, 311.

<sup>491</sup> Ford, "Statement by the President," Speech, Washington, D.C., 4 August 1975, 1.

<sup>492</sup> Ford, "Remarks of the President," World Affairs Council, San Francisco, California, 22 September, 1975, 10.

American people would come to see the long term benefits of the Helsinki accords in time. Ford acknowledged, “There was some criticism here,” but declared, “I think as the words and performance are seen and are better understood the reaction will be more and more positive.”<sup>493</sup>

### ***The Helsinki Accords: Short Term Impact on the 1976 Presidential Elections***

Regardless of this long term optimism, the Helsinki accords were a short term liability to Ford’s bid for election in the 1976 presidential elections. The accords were problematic in both the primary and general elections. Only four months after the Helsinki Conference, Ronald Reagan called Ford to inform him of his intention to challenge him for the Republican nomination.<sup>494</sup> Reagan purposefully attacked Ford’s foreign policy of détente as weakening America’s leadership position and criticized the Helsinki accords as an example. In a televised national address on March 31, 1976, Reagan characterized Ford’s foreign policy as “wandering without aim.”<sup>495</sup> Reagan accused Ford of supporting the Soviet Union’s dominance over Eastern European nations. In a harshly critical tone, Reagan rhetorically asked “why Mr. Ford traveled halfway ‘round the world to sign the Helsinki Pact, putting our stamp of approval on Russia’s enslavement of the captive nations? We gave away the freedom of millions of people.”<sup>496</sup> Leveraging his ability to connect emotionally with his audience, Reagan encouraged Americans to, “Ask the people of Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and all the others – East Germany, Bulgaria, Romania, ask them – what it’s like to live in a world where the Soviet Union is Number One.”<sup>497</sup> To underscore that this belief in Soviet appeasement was a theme that ran deeply throughout the Ford administration, Reagan cited Sonnenfelt’s misunderstood comments. He said, “Now we learn that another high official of the State

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<sup>493</sup> Ford and Rumor, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, D.C., 23 September 1975, 2.

<sup>494</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 310.

<sup>495</sup> Reagan, “Text of Governor Reagan’s Nationwide Television Address,” California, Speech, 31 March, 1976, 13.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

Department, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, has expressed the belief that, in effect, the captive nations should give up any claim of national sovereignty and simply become a part of the Soviet Union. He says, 'Their desire to break out of the Soviet straightjacket' threatens us with World War III."<sup>498</sup> He added for dramatic emphasis, "In other words, slaves should accept their fate."<sup>499</sup>

Ford was upset by Reagan's criticism of his participation in the Helsinki accords. He believed there were employees at the Pentagon who leaked information to Reagan about the Helsinki negotiations and discussions with Soviet leaders that could be exaggerated.<sup>500</sup> Provoked by Reagan's barbed criticism, the Ford administration finally attempted to communicate the purpose of the Helsinki accords. Administration officials stated, "The president did not go to Helsinki to put the stamp of approval on Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. On the contrary, he went to Helsinki . . . to sign a document which contains Soviet commitments to greater respect for human rights, self-determination of peoples, and expanded exchanges and communication throughout Europe."<sup>501</sup> Furthermore, they stated, "With regard to the particular case of the Baltic States, President Ford stated clearly on July 25 that 'the United States has never recognized that Soviet incorporation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia' and is not doing so now."<sup>502</sup> In direct response to the Sonnenfeldt comment, they said, "Our official policy of non-recognition is not affected by the results of the European Security Conference."<sup>503</sup>

But Reagan's most damaging move came with a proposal to modify the foreign policy plank in the Republican platform. Reagan supporters designed and advanced a plank entitled "Morality in Foreign Policy." The plank stated, "The goal of Republican foreign policy is the

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<sup>498</sup> Reagan, "Text of Governor Reagan's Nationwide Televised Address," Speech, 31 March 1976, California, 17.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>500</sup> DeFrank, *Write it When I'm Gone*, 128.

<sup>501</sup> Anderson to Hartman, "Reagan Speech," Memorandum, 31 March 1976, 23-24.

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

achievement of liberty under law and a just and lasting peace in the world.”<sup>504</sup> From there, the plank took direct aim at Ford’s participation in the Helsinki Conference. First, it lauded Soviet dissident and Helsinki opponent Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn stating, “We recognize and commend that great beacon of human courage and morality, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, for his compelling message that we must face the world with no illusions about the nature of tyranny. Ours will be a foreign policy that keeps this ever in mind.”<sup>505</sup> Second, it critically called out the Helsinki accords by name declaring, “Agreements that are negotiated, such as the one signed in Helsinki, must not take from those who do not have freedom the hope of one day gaining it.”<sup>506</sup> To avoid the infighting that could have cost him the nomination, Ford reluctantly agreed to support the platform. Dobrynin recalled that Ford’s actions infuriated Brezhnev. Brezhnev he said “was indignant at Ford and accused him of failing to take a position of peace candidate” which he felt “would have won over all honest Americans.”<sup>507</sup>

Reagan’s criticisms of the Helsinki Conference proved insufficient to cost Ford the nomination. After Reagan had announced his candidacy in November, he had led Ford 40 percent to 32 percent in trial polls.<sup>508</sup> After that point, Ford had eked out and maintained a narrow lead.<sup>509</sup> At the Republican Convention Ford finally won the nomination in a very close vote. Ford earned 1,187 delegates to Reagan’s 1,070.<sup>510</sup> However, the foreign policy and Helsinki Conference criticisms in the primary had been damaging. As a result, Ford’s overall approval rating dipped below 50 percent in the spring of 1976.<sup>511</sup> Following the Republican

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<sup>504</sup> “1976 Republican Platform,” Ford Presidential Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/platform/morality.htm>.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid.

<sup>507</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 369 and 371.

<sup>508</sup> VanCleve to Gergen, “Factors Influencing Presidential Approval Ratings,” Memorandum, June 1976, 4.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>510</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 319.

<sup>511</sup> Jones, “Gerald Ford Retrospective,” Gallup News Service, 29 December 2006, Table.

convention, Ford trailed Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter 36 percent to 51 percent in August 1976.<sup>512</sup>

The Helsinki accords faced intensified criticism in the general election. Following Reagan's lead, Carter harshly criticized the Ford administration's foreign policy. In an address at the Council on Foreign Relations, Carter claimed that, "Our foreign policy is in greater disarray than at any time in recent history."<sup>513</sup> Additionally, he seized upon Ford's communication weakness asserting in a *TIME* interview that, "Our foreign policy is without focus. It is not understood by the people, by the Congress or by foreign nations."<sup>514</sup> In a particularly barbarous comment, Carter dismissed Ford's role in foreign policy altogether. He stated, "I don't think the president plays any substantial role in the evolution of our foreign policy."<sup>515</sup>

Carter was equally and frequently critical of the Helsinki Conference. His criticisms focused on the perception that the Helsinki accords endorsed Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe. In an interview with *UPI*, he declared, "At Helsinki, we signed an agreement approving the takeover of Eastern Europe. I would be very much tougher in the following years with the Soviet Union."<sup>516</sup> In a speech in Youngstown, Ohio he accusingly stated, "When we've had negotiations at Helsinki, we approved Russia's takeover of Eastern Europe."<sup>517</sup> In an interview with *U.S. News and World Report* Carter declared, "We now have in Eastern Europe at least a tentative endorsement by our country of the domination of the region by the Soviet Union. They didn't have that before the Helsinki accords. It was a very great diplomatic achievement for the Soviets to have our promise not to interfere in their control over Eastern Europe."<sup>518</sup> In an

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<sup>512</sup> Jones, "Gerald Ford Retrospective," Gallup News Service, 29 December 2006, Table.

<sup>513</sup> Qtd., "Carter on Foreign Policy Debate Briefing Book," 6 October 1976, 1.

<sup>514</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>515</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>516</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>517</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>518</sup> Qtd., "Carter on Foreign Policy Debate Briefing Book," 6 October 1976, 2.

interview with *Capital Times*, he bluntly concluded, “I think we lost in Helsinki. We ratified the takeover of Eastern Europe. We got practically nothing in return.”<sup>519</sup> But one of Carter’s strongest attacks was to criticize Ford’s worldview of peace through strength. In his address to the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations Carter said, “For too long, our foreign policy has consisted almost entirely of maneuver and manipulation, based on the assumption that the world is a jungle of competing national antagonisms, where military supremacy and economic muscle are the only things that work where rival powers are balanced against each other to keep the peace.”<sup>520</sup>

Carter’s relentless attacks on Ford’s détente policy, his signing of the Helsinki Accords, and his peace through strength beliefs were brutal and led to a critical moment of the campaign. The second presidential debate in San Francisco focused on foreign policy and proved to have incredible significance for the 1976 Campaign. This was the first time since the 1960s that the presidential campaign featured televised debates.<sup>521</sup> Ford admitted that “Foreign policy and national defense were my forte” and he therefore “failed to spend as much time preparing for the second debate as I should have.”<sup>522</sup>

The televised foreign policy debate was moderated by *New York Times* associate editor Max Frankel and proved to be intense. At one critical moment, Carter reasserted his accusation that Ford was disengaged saying, “as far as foreign policy goes, Mr. Kissinger has been the president of this country. Mr. Ford has shown an absence of leadership and an absence of a grasp of what this country is and what it ought to be.”<sup>523</sup> This comment put Ford on the defensive and resulted in an infamous gaffe regarding the Helsinki accords. Frankel asked Ford about détente

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<sup>519</sup> Qtd., “Carter on Foreign Policy Debate Briefing Book,” 6 October 1976, 4.

<sup>520</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>521</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 327.

<sup>522</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 420.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, 420.

and the state of Soviet-American relations. Frankel first commented, “We virtually signed, in Helsinki, an agreement that the Russians have dominance in Eastern Europe.”<sup>524</sup> Then he asked Ford, “Is that what you would call a two-way street of traffic in Europe?”<sup>525</sup> Ford responded, “In the case of Helsinki, thirty-five nations signed an agreement, including the Secretary of State for the Vatican. I can’t under any circumstances believe that His Holiness the Pope would agree, by signing that agreement, that the thirty-five nations have turned over to the Warsaw nations the domination of Eastern Europe. It just isn’t true.”<sup>526</sup> Ford had been briefed to avoid acknowledging the contentious Sonnenfeld Doctrine and so further stated, “There is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, and there never will be under a Ford Administration.”<sup>527</sup> The dismayed Frankel countered, “Did I understand you to say, sir, that the Russians are not using Eastern Europe as their sphere of influence and occupying most of their countries there and making sure with their troops that it’s a Communist zone?”<sup>528</sup>

Ford’s mistake in the foreign policy debate was costly. The media criticisms of his statement that the Soviets did not dominate Eastern Europe were sharp. However, Ford initially refused to issue a clarification. Ford recalled, “I can be very stubborn when I think I’m right, and I just didn’t want to apologize for something that was a minor mistake.”<sup>529</sup> But Ford’s Chief of Staff Richard Cheney urged him to clarify his position because he believed this mistake characterized Ford’s image as an intellectual light weight. Cheney recalled, “One of the reasons the second debate with Carter in San Francisco on foreign policy hurt so much was because it raised again the question of intellectual competence. The statement by the president that Poland

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<sup>524</sup> Qtd., Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 422.

<sup>525</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 422.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, 422.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*, 422.

<sup>528</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 422.

<sup>529</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 424.

is not dominated by the Soviet Union was at the heart of the problem. It wasn't the content of what he said so much as this impression that it created once again that he didn't know Poland was dominated by the Soviet Union."<sup>530</sup> Ford's Press Secretary Ron Nessen concurred. He recalled the mistake was particularly harmful because "it reinforced his bumbler image by making people thing [sic] not only that he was a physical bumbler, but that he also couldn't think on his feet."<sup>531</sup> Ford finally agreed and issued a clarification after the debate. He said, "In the debate I spoke of America's firm support for the aspiration of independence of the nations of Eastern Europe. The United States has never conceded – and never will concede – their domination by the Soviet Union. ... It is our policy to use every peaceful means to assist countries in Eastern Europe in their efforts to become less dependent on the Soviet Union."<sup>532</sup> But the damage had been done. Before the debate, Gallup polling showed Carter leading Ford by just two points, 47 percent to 45 percent.<sup>533</sup> But after the debate, Carter's lead widened to six points.<sup>534</sup> Pollster George Gallup called Ford's Helsinki gaffe the "most decisive moment in the campaign."<sup>535</sup>

The 1976 election would go down to the wire. In an attempt to recover from his debate mistake and overtake Carter, the Ford campaign launched a \$10 million advertising blitz and barnstormed through the swing states.<sup>536</sup> The campaign race grew tighter. Gallup's final pre-election poll showed Ford and Carter to be in a statistical dead heat with 49 percent supporting Ford and 48 percent supporting Carter.<sup>537</sup> A Harris poll gave Carter a slim lead of 46 percent to

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<sup>530</sup> Qtd., Thompson, *The Ford Presidency: Twenty-Two Intimate Perspectives of Gerald R. Ford*, 78.

<sup>531</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>532</sup> Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 424.

<sup>533</sup> Jones, "Gerald Ford Retrospective," Gallup News Service, 29 December 2006, Table.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>535</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 134.

<sup>536</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 336.

<sup>537</sup> Jones, "Gerald Ford Retrospective," Gallup News Service, 29 December 2006, 6.



45.<sup>538</sup> In the election itself, Ford narrowly lost the popular vote 48 percent to 50 percent.<sup>539</sup> In the Electoral College, the final tally was 240 for Ford to 297 for Carter.<sup>540</sup> Numerous issues drove Ford's loss, including the struggling American economy and Ford's controversial pardon of Richard Nixon. However, in an election this close the relentless political attacks regarding his leadership at the Helsinki Conference and his communication mistake in the second debate were contributing factors.

### ***The Helsinki Accords: Long Term Impact on European Freedom & German Reunification***

Ford paid a steep personal political price for signing the Helsinki accords in the 1976 presidential election. However, his enduring optimism of the long term success of the agreements proved to be well founded. Over the next decade and a half, the Helsinki accords would inspire citizens to pursue changes in the political structures of the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc nations. In addition to its publication in *Pravda*, the content of the Helsinki Final Act was broadcast into Eastern Europe by the BBC and Radio Free Europe.<sup>541</sup> As the Helsinki Final Act was distributed and absorbed, it became "the manifesto of the dissident and liberal movement."<sup>542</sup> Helsinki motivated movements emerged most notably in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union itself. Perhaps most dramatically, the Helsinki accords were an important compass guiding German reunification. By requiring its signatories to uphold human rights and self-determination, and encourage free trade during difficult economic times, the Helsinki accords were a powerful spark that contributed to the end of the Cold War.

The Helsinki accords played an instrumental role in the Polish human rights movement. Poland's Constitution was relatively protective of human rights and activists used that to find

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<sup>538</sup> Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*, 336-337.

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>541</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 98.

<sup>542</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 346.

ways to link Poland's domestic policy to its international commitments.<sup>543</sup> Five months after the Helsinki Conference, fifty-nine of Poland's prominent non-government leaders wrote an open letter to the Speaker of the Polish Parliament demanding that the government practice the policies it had committed to in Helsinki.<sup>544</sup> This demand was soon echoed by a powerful ally when the Catholic Church joined the protest and "the influential Secretariat of the Polish Episcopate declared that any constitutional reforms should be consistent with the principles of the Helsinki Final Act."<sup>545</sup> Poland's human rights movement had become emboldened by the words and spirit of the Helsinki accords.

These demands severely challenged the Polish government in the face of the country's economic problems. Polish Premier Edward Gierek found it difficult to balance the demand for greater human rights along with economic advancement. Economic issues like high oil prices, weak Polish exports, and an increasing debt all hurt the Polish government's ability to ameliorate issues through price controls or other government involvement in the economy.<sup>546</sup> Gierek's advisors encouraged him to restrain consumption while also improving Western relations in the hope that the economic assistance would spark the economy.<sup>547</sup> In the upheaval that followed, workers began to strike. A new group called the Committee in Defense of Human and Civil Rights formed, with its name specifically inspired by Helsinki's Final Act.<sup>548</sup> Despite the fact that he had criticized the Helsinki accords, President Carter visited Warsaw in 1977 and endorsed the movement to monitor the Helsinki compliance movement of the new Committee.<sup>549</sup> And as the movement gained momentum, the newly elected Pope John Paul II celebrated a 1979

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<sup>543</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 103.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>547</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>549</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 199.

mass in Warsaw with a crowd of 250,000 who waved a banner that proudly read, “Freedom, independence, and human rights.”<sup>550</sup>

Bolstered by this spirit of freedom and continued economic oppression, workers’ unions created a powerful force for change in Poland. Angered by the government’s ill-conceived economic policy, workers across the nation went on strikes.<sup>551</sup> On August 14, 1980, activist Lech “Walesa announced the formation of the first independent and self-governing trade union ever in the Marxist-Leninist world” called Solidarity.<sup>552</sup> In light of such widespread dissent, the Polish government made an unprecedented decision. It agreed to recognize Walesa’s independent trade union.<sup>553</sup> In the months that followed, almost one-third of Poland’s population joined Solidarity.<sup>554</sup> In 1981, Communist supporters called for a Soviet invasion to put down the Polish workers’ movement. But in an uncharacteristic respect for the Helsinki accord’s principle of non-intervention, KGB leader Yuri Andropov informed the Soviet Politburo, “We don’t intend to introduce troops into Poland.”<sup>555</sup> He said, “Even if Poland falls under the control of ‘Solidarity,’ that is the way it will be.”<sup>556</sup> Following this decision, emboldened activists created the Polish Helsinki Committee in early 1982 to monitor and report human rights abuses of the Polish government.<sup>557</sup> Finally, Communist rule in Poland collapsed. In May 1990, free elections were held and the Solidarity leaders replaced Communist leaders in what was the “first break in the Iron Curtain in more than forty years.”<sup>558</sup> Though it took fifteen years, the Helsinki accords played an inspirational role in establishing democracy in Poland.

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<sup>550</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 201.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>552</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 218.

<sup>553</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 203-204.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>555</sup> Qtd., Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 207.

<sup>556</sup> Qtd., Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 221.

<sup>557</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 208.

<sup>558</sup> “The Presidents: G.H.W. Bush,” American Experience, PBS Documentary, 2012.

Like Poland, Czechoslovakia followed a painful but rewarding Helsinki inspired path to political transformation. Immediately after the Helsinki Conference, activists saw the Final Act as an opportunity to have an open dialogue with the government that had not been possible since the Soviet invasion in the 1968 Prague Spring.<sup>559</sup> Czechoslovakian protestors sent hoards of petitions for domestic reforms and international supervision.<sup>560</sup> However, a Czechoslovakian activist band named Plastic People of the Universe was arrested in 1976 and put on trial.<sup>561</sup> Their controversial trial inspired 242 people to sign a document called Charter 77 which demanded the Czechoslovakian government to uphold the free expression principles it had signed at the Helsinki Conference in 1975.<sup>562</sup> The Charter 77 document stated that important Czechoslovakian laws were confirmed in Helsinki in 1975 and “from that date our citizens have the right, and our state the duty, to abide by them.”<sup>563</sup>

The Czechoslovakian government struggled with its response to Charter 77. Soviet advisors rushed in and as a result many of the leaders of Charter 77 were interrogated and arrested.<sup>564</sup> One detainee was playwright Vaclav Havel who used his prison time to write essays and plays that encouraged citizens to change the system by “developing standards for the individual behavior apart from those of the state.”<sup>565</sup> The U.S. State Department abandoned its policy of non-intervention and strongly condemned the arrests as a failure to uphold the Helsinki principles.<sup>566</sup> Given this strong international response, Charter 77 dissidents, along with activists from a new group called the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted, continued to

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<sup>559</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 100.

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>561</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 190.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>563</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 178.

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>565</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 191.

<sup>566</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 181.

document and communicate human rights violations to Helsinki review conferences.<sup>567</sup> Their persistence finally paid off. On June 9, 1990, Czechoslovakians held elections in which the Civic Forum coalition won parliamentary control.<sup>568</sup>

Although Brezhnev and Gromyko had been sure that their hard fought non-intervention clause would protect them from outside pressure to reform their human rights policies, the Helsinki accords even inspired change within the Soviet Union itself. Dobrynin recalled that Brezhnev did not believe the human rights principles in the Helsinki accords “would not bring much trouble inside the country. But he was wrong.”<sup>569</sup> He went on to admit that while “the condition of Soviet dissidents did not change overnight, they were encouraged by this historic document” in a way that was “totally beyond the imagination of Soviet leadership.”<sup>570</sup>

Like those in Poland and Czechoslovakia, the Helsinki inspired human rights movement in the Soviet Union began within a year of the signing of the accords. In the weeks that followed the Helsinki Conference, a group of Soviet dissidents courageously met with visiting U.S. congressional leaders. The dissidents “expressed their hope that the West would hold the Kremlin accountable for its commitments under the Final Act.”<sup>571</sup> Emboldened by the enthusiastic response from these congressional leaders, the Group to Promote the Implementation of the Helsinki accords was formed in Moscow and endorsed by popular dissident, physicist Andrei Sakharov.<sup>572</sup> Similar Helsinki Groups emerged in the Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Lithuania.<sup>573</sup> Soviet leadership surprisingly permitted the existence of these groups. This unprecedented acceptance appeared to be motivated by economic

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<sup>567</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 213.

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>569</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 346.

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

<sup>571</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 100.

<sup>572</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 191.

<sup>573</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 163-164.

considerations. The Soviet economy had declined in 1976 and Soviet leadership counted on the Western trade expansion promoted by Basket Two of the Helsinki agreements for recovery.<sup>574</sup>

However, ten years after the Helsinki Conference the human rights record in the Soviet Union had shown little improvement. As with their Eastern bloc neighbors, prominent members of the Helsinki Groups in Moscow, Ukraine, Lithuania, and Georgia were arrested and imprisoned in 1978.<sup>575</sup> Many more were arrested in the years that followed. At the tenth anniversary Helsinki Conference, U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz made a bold speech condemning the Soviet human rights record. He warned that, “Tensions will exist so long as some persist in violating the most fundamental human rights. Pious declarations are cheap. Real progress can only be seen in its effect on human beings.”<sup>576</sup> Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze angrily retorted, “Our country has not allowed and will not allow anyone to intervene in internal affairs.”<sup>577</sup> Brezhnev’s non-interference principle remained firmly in place.

But by the mid-1980s, a number of Soviet leaders including Mikhail Gorbachev aspired to reform the Soviet government. Many of Gorbachev’s early supporters still wanted internal economic reform with the kind of trade with the West encouraged in the Helsinki agreements.<sup>578</sup> Gorbachev was thus attracted to the Helsinki agreements and “the potential opportunities for a pan-European policy which lay in the spirit of Helsinki.”<sup>579</sup>

Gorbachev put his aspirations into concrete action. First, he informed Secretary of State George Schultz that he was prepared to discuss human rights at an upcoming Soviet-American summit.<sup>580</sup> Second, Gorbachev released Soviet political prisoners. He immediately released a

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<sup>574</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 166.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>576</sup> Qtd., Kempster, “The U.S. Assails Moscow on Rights Issue,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 July 1985.

<sup>577</sup> Qtd., *Ibid.*

<sup>578</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 228 & 230.

<sup>579</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>580</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 233.

third of the Soviet Union's political prisoners, including Andrei Sakharov.<sup>581</sup> In 1987 and 1988, the Soviets freed a total of 600 political prisoners.<sup>582</sup> Third, in order to win support from Europe and the rest of the West, Gorbachev approved unprecedented levels of international human rights monitoring. The Kremlin accepted human rights focused visits of foreign judges, prosecutors, and psychiatrists.<sup>583</sup> In September of 1987, Soviet ambassador Yuri Kashlev stated that the Soviets would allow the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights to visit the Soviet Union.<sup>584</sup> Finally, and most startlingly, he allowed two Soviet groups known as Perestroika '88 and the Democracy and Humanism Seminar to create the first Soviet opposition political party, the Democratic Union.<sup>585</sup> The Reagan administration, always a harsh critic of Moscow, cautiously approved. The official statement read, "At home, the Soviet leadership's campaign for more [openness] and democratization continued to improve the opportunities for Soviet citizens to express their views, both in the official media and through unofficial organizations and publications."<sup>586</sup> These collective changes led by Gorbachev were significantly influenced by the economic and human rights principles outlined in the Helsinki accords. However, the most visible impact of the Helsinki accords on Soviet attitude and behavior came in response to the movement in Germany.

One of the most monumental events marking the end of the Cold War was the reunification of Germany. The Helsinki accords played a significant and visible role in this historic event. East German citizens learned of the freedom of movement principle in the Helsinki accords through radio and churches. As a result, approximately 100,000 East Germans

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<sup>581</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 238-239.

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>585</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>586</sup> "Soviets Improve, but Still Fall Short, U.S. Asserts," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 December 1988.

applied for exit visas in the year following the Helsinki Conference.<sup>587</sup> To encourage this momentum, Dr. Karl-Heinz Nitschke created a human rights petition to insist that the East German government uphold the principles it had signed in Helsinki and in 1985 activists founded the Initiative for Peace and Human rights.<sup>588</sup>

The demand for the freedom of movement embodied in the Helsinki accords peaked in 1989. In September, about six thousand East Germans on vacation in Hungary illegally entered Austria and went to the West German embassy to seek asylum.<sup>589</sup> Citing its commitment to the Helsinki agreements, as well as the U.N. Convention on Refugees, Hungary officially opened its borders to Austria to legalize this emigration.<sup>590</sup> East German General Secretary Eric Honecker resigned as protest demonstrations escalated.<sup>591</sup> With Gorbachev's encouragement his successor, Egon Krenz, announced that East Germans could freely travel to the West.<sup>592</sup> On November 9, the Berlin Wall fell. President Bush endorsed this decision to honor the Helsinki agreements. In a press conference he said, "I welcome the decision by the East German leadership to open the borders to those wishing to emigrate or travel. And this, if it's implemented fully, certainly conforms with the Helsinki Final Act which the German Democratic Republic signed."<sup>593</sup> He continued, "It's the kind of development that we have long encouraged by our strong support for the Helsinki Final Act."<sup>594</sup> When asked by reporters if he ever imagined anything like this happening, Bush honestly replied that he didn't foresee it, but "We've imagined it."<sup>595</sup>

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<sup>587</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 109.

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid.*, 109 & 249.

<sup>589</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>592</sup> "The Presidents: G.H.W. Bush," American Experience, PBS Documentary, 2012.

<sup>593</sup> Bush, "Remarks and a Question and Answer with Reporters" on the Relaxation of East German Border Controls," Washington, D.C., 9 November 1989, 1.

<sup>594</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>595</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.



Throughout these historic European events, Gorbachev honored the Helsinki accords. As demonstrations spread across Germany and the Eastern bloc nations, he supported the non-use of force principle outlined in the Helsinki accords and urged his counterparts to do the same.<sup>596</sup> Pavel Palazchenko of the Soviet Foreign Ministry recalled, “Gorbachev was encouraging reforms, definitely. And he believed and said that if we wanted change in our country, if we wanted to abandon the old system in our country, how could we inhibit or prohibit change in our neighbors?”<sup>597</sup> In fact, at the Malta summit with President Bush in December 1989, Gorbachev specifically requested that the democracy movement sweeping across Eastern Europe be communicated as consistent with the principles of the Helsinki accords, rather than Western values.<sup>598</sup> Bush supported this request. According to Condoleeza Rice, Bush’s Soviet expert on the National Security Council, the president “was determined that no one was going to feel defeated.”<sup>599</sup>

Soon after the Berlin Wall was torn down, the reunification of Germany was initiated under the principles of the Helsinki accords. On February 2, 1990 West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl declared, “The question of German unity is a question of the right of self-determination. All peoples of this Earth have the right of self-determination. . . . It corresponds to the principles of the CSCE.”<sup>600</sup> As reunification talks moved forward, the controversial question that followed was which alliance the unified Germany would join. Gorbachev recalled, “I said we want Germany to be neutral. That was our original position that we proposed. This was a subject of very passionate debate.”<sup>601</sup> The Helsinki accords determined the outcome. Rice

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<sup>596</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 250.

<sup>597</sup> Qtd., “The Presidents: G.H.W. Bush,” American Experience, PBS Documentary, 2012.

<sup>598</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 251.

<sup>599</sup> Qtd., “The Presidents: G.H.W. Bush,” American Experience, PBS Documentary, 2012.

<sup>600</sup> Bush, “Remarks at Joint News Conference Following Discussions with Chancellor Helmut Kohl of the Federal Republic of Germany,” Washington, D.C., 25 February 1990.

<sup>601</sup> Qtd., “The Presidents: G.H.W. Bush,” American Experience, PBS Documentary, 2012.

recalled during the negotiations, “President Bush said, ‘Of course the Helsinki accords we all signed in 1975 allowed that any state in Europe can choose its alliances. So once there’s a unified Germany, it can choose its alliances.’ And Gorbachev said, ‘That’s right.’”<sup>602</sup> At a press conference, Bush summarized their joint stance and stated, “I believe, as do Chancellor Kohl and the members of the alliance that the united Germany should be a full member of NATO. President Gorbachev, frankly, does not hold that view. But we are in full agreement that the matter of alliance membership is in accordance with the Helsinki Final Act, a matter for Germans to decide.”<sup>603</sup> On October 3, 1990 the German people voted to reunify and ultimately to join the NATO alliance.<sup>604</sup> In that same year, the Communist Party “renounced its leading role” in the Soviet Union and opposition parties won semi-free elections in Moscow and Leningrad.<sup>605</sup>

Fifteen years after President Ford attended the controversial Helsinki Conference, the promises made in the Final Act to promote peaceful self-determination and human rights were finally kept. Communism had collapsed and the Cold War had come to an end. When asked in a 1991 interview if any of his policies had gained more respect with time, Ford cited the Helsinki accords. He recalled, “You will remember the hell we caught from Reagan and all kinds of individuals and organizations that said it was wrong to participate. Well, the Helsinki accords I honestly believe were a major factor in bringing about the human rights revolt in Poland, Czechoslovakia . . . and current ramifications in the Soviet Union.”<sup>606</sup> President Bush frequently consulted Ford on foreign policy matters and had secured telephones placed in Ford’s home.<sup>607</sup> While records of their conversations are not available, it is not inconceivable that they discussed

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<sup>602</sup> Qtd., “The Presidents: G.H.W. Bush,” American Experience, PBS Documentary, 2012.

<sup>603</sup> Qtd., Ibid.

<sup>604</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 252.

<sup>605</sup> Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 255.

<sup>606</sup> DeFrank, *Write it When I’m Gone*, 101.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid., 179.

these events which Ford had not foreseen, but had also imagined, as he signed the Helsinki accords in 1975.

## Conclusion:

### **The Promises We Keep: Legacy of President Ford's Leadership at the Helsinki Conference**

As he reflected on his values to write his memoirs, Gerald Ford took a blue ball point pen and wrote on the top of a yellow legal pad, “My Definition of a Statesman as Opposed to a Politician.”<sup>608</sup> He wrote that a politician as one who “is interested in the next election” in contrast to a statesman who is “concerned about the next generation.”<sup>609</sup> Ford further penned his optimistic belief that, “A statesman is one who believes in the ultimate good judgment of the American people and therefore takes the position that if all the facts are known he will survive the next election & the nation will be better off.”<sup>610</sup> By his own definition, Ford’s leadership at the Helsinki Conference was that of a statesman. In the short term, his failure to communicate the facts and benefits of the Helsinki agreements to ensure the “good judgment of American people” would prevail resulted in severe criticism and a failed bid for election in 1976. However, his courageous decision to attend the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and sign the Helsinki Final Act contributed to the peaceful advancement of human rights and self-determination when the next generation of leaders kept the promises their predecessors had made in Helsinki. Though he didn’t count it among his top achievements as he left the oval office, fifteen years later Ford cited the Helsinki accords as one of his administration’s greatest accomplishments.<sup>611</sup> “The longer time passes,” Ford reflected, “the better the Helsinki accords appear.”<sup>612</sup>

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<sup>608</sup> Ford, “Gerald Ford’s Personal Handwritten Reflections,” 1977 or 1978, Ford Presidential Library.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid.

<sup>611</sup> DeFrank, *Write it When I’m Gone*, 101.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid., 101.

President Ford brought to the Helsinki accords the leadership beliefs, strengths, and weaknesses he had developed throughout his formative WWII military, congressional, and vice presidential experiences. First, he brought his internationalist belief that America must play a visible leadership role in world affairs. This belief began during his WWII naval service in the Pacific and earned him his first seat in the House of Representatives when he ran on an internationalist platform. Throughout his nearly twenty five years in the House, Congressman Ford supported America's international leadership initiatives to promote global freedom and contain Communism. His consistent support spanned the initial proposal for NATO, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and funding for efforts such as Radio Free Europe during the Cold War. Second, he developed his belief that world peace could best be achieved through America's military strength. As a long term member of the Appropriations Defense Sub-Committee and the Intelligence Sub-Committee on Appropriations, Ford developed a detailed understanding of defense initiatives and consistently supported spending to maintain America's military superiority. As his peace through strength stance solidified, Ford co-authored the Republican Party's Vietnam War position, emphasizing the importance of containment through authoritative military action. His personal visits abroad to China, Korea, Vietnam, and Japan further convinced him of the importance of meeting the increased military strength of the Soviets.

In addition to these firmly held beliefs, Ford developed several leadership strengths throughout his career that served him well at the Helsinki Conference. The first strength was courage in the face of opposition. Ford boldly faced the old guard to challenge Charles Halleck to win the role of House Minority Leader and resolutely supported the moderate Eisenhower for president while facing threats from constituents to challenge his seat with a more conservative candidate. In perhaps his boldest show of courage as a congressman, Ford withstood personal

attacks while denouncing what he believed was President Johnson's timid strategy in Vietnam. The second strength Ford built was collaboration through relationship building. He built strong relationships with his constituents in Michigan and with his congressional colleagues as he won partisan respect and support for his work on the Appropriations Sub-Committees. He further refined this skill as Minority Leader building coalitions to advance President Nixon's agenda. But the hallmark strength he built over his career was his unquestionable integrity. In his vice presidential confirmation proceedings, Ford authorized full access to the financial, medical, political, and personal records that spanned his entire career. He emerged from this unprecedented evaluation of a public servant's integrity with a spotless record.

However, Ford failed to develop a strength that could have significantly minimized the short term personal price he paid for his leadership at the Helsinki Conference. Throughout his career, he failed to hone the strength of inspirational communication. This was due to several factors. First, the detailed budget work of his Appropriations Committees did not demand inspirational communication. Second, Ford allowed himself to be overshadowed by more outgoing and engaging politicians such as Senate Minority leader, Ev Dirksen. Third, the attacks he received from President Johnson reinforced his image as poor communicator. Finally, Ford was so popular in his district, that he easily won reelection without the need to build the strong communication skills typically developed during campaigns.

Equipped with these beliefs, strengths, and key weakness developed over his military and political career, Gerald Ford unexpectedly ascended to the presidency upon the resignation of Richard Nixon in 1974. He entered the oval office during a time of crisis. The nation was facing its worst economic deterioration since the Great Depression and had lost faith in its government leaders due to the presidential dishonesty during the Vietnam War and Watergate scandal. While

he faced pressure to address America's domestic crises, Ford was determined to restore America's leadership in the world through his assertive foreign policy. He faced significant headwinds as he sought to accomplish this goal. The American public had become increasingly isolationist, the media had become critical, and Congress had become increasingly involved in foreign affairs. However, there emerged a heightened demand for morality in government. Under these challenging circumstances, Ford decided to play a leadership role in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Ford's leveraged his leadership beliefs and strengths throughout his work at the Helsinki Conference. First, he utilized his collaborative relationship building to complete the negotiations of human rights and peaceful border settlement into the Final Act with the reluctant Soviets. Additionally, he negotiated arms reduction talks with the Soviets in exchange for his personal attendance at the conference. Second, Ford displayed courage in the face of fierce opposition and criticism from the media, Congress, and Americans of East European descent who all feared the Helsinki Final Act solidified the Soviet Union's domination of Eastern Europe. Third, Ford used his relationship building strengths in the visible, personal diplomacy he conducted in his meetings with the Eastern bloc leaders of Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union, as well as with his Western European allies. Finally, Ford demonstrated his integrity in his speech at the conference. Ford was able to "amplify hope" for a more peaceful world and deliver a compelling call to action for the signatory nations to keep the promises of peace, equality, freedom, and human rights espoused in the Helsinki accords.

Despite his success during the conference, Ford failed to clearly communicate the purpose, importance, and benefits of the Helsinki agreements to the American people. He admittedly underestimated the importance of this communication and missed several public

relations opportunities at press conferences to do so. Instead, the Helsinki Final Act became a Soviet propaganda victory and Ford drew criticism from Congress and the media at home. In the immediate aftermath of the conference, Ford's approval ratings dropped. The Helsinki accords then became a major liability during the presidential elections of 1976. Ronald Reagan challenged Ford in the 1976 Republican primaries and used Helsinki as a major point of attack. Jimmy Carter similarly attacked Ford for his role in Helsinki during the general election. But Ford's communication weakness again proved disastrous when in the foreign policy debate with Carter when he was asked a question about the Helsinki agreements and unintentionally insinuated that the Soviet did not dominate Eastern Europe. The media criticism continued. In part fueled by this criticism, Ford narrowly lost the election.

Though Ford paid a steep political price for his role at the Helsinki Conference in the short term, the Final Act ultimately had a positive long term impact European freedom. In the aftermath of the Helsinki Conference, the Final Act became an inspirational document that inspired many East European dissident movements. In Poland, the human rights promises in the Helsinki Final Act, coupled with economic repression, motivated workers to unite and successfully oppose their Communist government. In Czechoslovakia, the Helsinki Final Act inspired dissidents to author Charter 77 which demanded that the government deliver on the human rights promises it had signed. In the Soviet Union, the principles of the Helsinki accords were embraced by emerging leaders such as President Mikhail Gorbachev to shape the economic and political transformation of the Soviet Union. Most impressively, the self-determination and free movement principles of the Helsinki Final Act were invoked by President Bush and President Gorbachev to nurture the peaceful reunification of Germany and the right of the German people to join the alliance of their choice. Through this historic lens, Ford's actions at



Helsinki are viewed much more favorably. In fact, Ford's approval rating has improved from the dismal average of only 47 percent during his presidency to 60 percent in recent years.<sup>613</sup> As Ford had predicted in his 1975 speech in Helsinki, history did indeed judge the Helsinki accords by the promises its signatories had made.

Today, the United States faces an eerily similar situation to that faced by President Ford during his presidency. As in 1974, the American economy is struggling. Today's economy is characterized by sluggish growth and relatively high unemployment following the crippling recession that began in 2008. Also reminiscent of 1974, the nation faces a crisis of confidence in its political leaders. Sparked by controversies such as the growing national debt, the federal debt ceiling, and the national healthcare law, American's trust in government leaders is failing.<sup>614</sup> Trust in the executive branch currently stands at only 51 percent with trust in the legislative branch at only 34 percent.<sup>615</sup> But perhaps most troublingly, there is evidence of a reemerging Cold War.

The United States and Russia are once again embroiled in a political controversy regarding the rights of a sovereign nation. Ukraine is a former republic of the Soviet Union and includes a region known as the Crimean Peninsula. The Crimean Peninsula has a majority Russian ethnic population and was part of Russia until the Soviet Union transferred control of the territory to the Ukrainian Republic in 1954.<sup>616</sup> With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Crimean Peninsula remained with the newly independent nation of Ukraine.<sup>617</sup> In the past several months, a popular revolt erupted when Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich

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<sup>613</sup> Jones, "History Usually Kinder to Ex-Presidents," Gallup News Service, 29 December 2006.

<sup>614</sup> Jones, "Americans' Trust in Government Generally Down this Year," Gallup News Service, 29 December 2013.

<sup>615</sup> Ibid.

<sup>616</sup> Demczuk, "U.S. Imposes New Sanctions on Russia." *The New York Times*. 18 March 2014.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid.

rejected a European Union trade agreement in favor of strengthening ties to Russia.<sup>618</sup> The revolt escalated and resulted in the removal of Yanukovich from office in February 2014.<sup>619</sup> This ouster prompted Russian President Vladimir Putin to deploy troops to the Crimean Peninsula.<sup>620</sup> During this military occupation, Putin held a referendum from which he claims 97 percent of the Crimean people voted to join Russia.<sup>621</sup> Following this referendum Russian President Vladimir Putin announced his annexation of Crimea.<sup>622</sup> A Russian flag now flies on the roof of the City Hall in Bakhchysarai in central Crimea.<sup>623</sup>

The annexation of Crimea by Russia has ignited a Cold War style controversy in the international community. Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsnyuk was outraged and called the annexation “a robbery on an international scale.”<sup>624</sup> Ukrainian member of Parliament, Petro Poroshenko echoed this sentiment saying the Ukraine is now at “the beginning of a very dangerous conflict, and we should do our best to stop this process.”<sup>625</sup> Western nations are aligned in their condemnation of Russia’s actions. British Prime Minister David Cameron declared that the annexation delivered “a chilling message across the continent of Europe.”<sup>626</sup> German Chancellor Angela Merkel called the move “a violation of international law.”<sup>627</sup> President Obama criticized Putin’s actions saying it was inappropriate for Russia to threaten Ukraine militarily and “because you’re bigger and stronger, [take] a piece of the country.”<sup>628</sup> He further stated, “That is not how international law and international norms are observed in the 21<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>618</sup> Smith, “Ukraine Cries ‘Robbery’ as Russia Annexes Crimea,” CNN. 18 March 2014.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid.

<sup>621</sup> Demczuk, “U.S. Imposes New Sanctions on Russia.” *The New York Times*. 18 March 2014.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid.

<sup>623</sup> Qtd., Ibid.

<sup>624</sup> Qtd., Ibid.

<sup>625</sup> Qtd., Ibid.

<sup>626</sup> Qtd., Ibid.

<sup>627</sup> Qtd., Ibid.

<sup>628</sup> Watkins, “White House: Putin, Obama discuss possible ‘diplomatic solution’ in Ukraine,” CNN, 29 March 2014.

century.”<sup>629</sup> Russian leaders disagree and justify the actions as necessary to protect Crimean citizens from the illegitimate new government in Ukraine. Putin told the Politburo that the Crimean referendum to join Russia resulted in “a very convincing figure” and further declared that, “In our hearts, we know Crimea has always been an inalienable part of Russia.”<sup>630</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev concurs and supports the annexation saying it “should be welcomed and not met with the announcement of sanctions.”<sup>631</sup>

The response of both sides echoes Cold War actions and has further escalated the tension. The United States Congress has approved a \$1 billion line of credit to support the troubled new Ukrainian government.<sup>632</sup> The industrialized G7 nations have agreed to meet without Russia.<sup>633</sup> Additionally, President Obama announced sanctions that freeze the assets and restrict the travel of a select group of Putin advisors.<sup>634</sup> In issuing these sanctions, Obama stated, “We’re making it clear that there are consequences for [Russia’s] actions.”<sup>635</sup> However, the sanctions did not target high level Russian leaders and were therefore “met with derision and even mockery in Moscow.”<sup>636</sup> Since the annexation, Putin has amassed more troops along the Ukrainian border. United States officials believe there could be approximately 40,000 troops there based on satellite imagery.<sup>637</sup> Western nations are concerned that Russia may intend to use these troops to overtake more of Ukraine and other former republics such as Moldova.<sup>638</sup> On the morning of March 28, 2014, President Putin called President Obama to discuss diplomatic solutions.<sup>639</sup>

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<sup>629</sup> Watkins, “White House: Putin, Obama discuss possible ‘diplomatic solution’ in Ukraine,” CNN, 29 March 2014.

<sup>630</sup> Qtd., Smith, “Ukraine Cries ‘Robbery’ as Russia Annexes Crimea,” CNN, 18 March 2014.

<sup>631</sup> Qtd., Demczuk, “U.S. Imposes New Sanctions on Russia,” *The New York Times*, 18 March 2014.

<sup>632</sup> Watkins, “White House: Putin, Obama discuss possible ‘diplomatic solution’ in Ukraine,” CNN, 29 March 2014.

<sup>633</sup> Smith-Spark, “Obama: U.S. and Europe united over Ukraine crisis,” CNN, 27 March 2014.

<sup>634</sup> Demczuk, “U.S. Imposes New Sanctions on Russia,” *The New York Times*, 18 March 2014.

<sup>635</sup> Qtd., Ibid.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid.

<sup>637</sup> Watkins, “White House: Putin, Obama discuss possible ‘diplomatic solution’ in Ukraine,” CNN, 29 March 2014.

<sup>638</sup> Smith-Spark, “Obama: U.S. and Europe united over Ukraine crisis,” CNN, 27 March 2014.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid.

The Helsinki Final Act and President Ford's leadership example provide a valuable framework to guide this contemporary diplomatic discussion. When they signed the Final Act, both the United States and the Soviet Union promised to resolve disputes peacefully. They agreed to recognize the sovereign equality of nations like Ukraine, regardless of size or political belief. Similarly, they agreed each nation has the right to self-determination of its political, economic, and social systems without intervention into its internal affairs. Furthermore, they agreed that border disputes would be resolved peacefully and without the use or threat of force. Under the Helsinki accords, the people of Ukraine have been promised the right to determine their own future. In conducting their diplomatic discussions to this end, today's leaders would be wise to follow President Ford's leadership example. Their discussions would be most productive if conducted in a spirit of collaborative compromise, courage, and integrity. Critically, they must avoid Ford's communication failures. Each leader must communicate honest and compelling messages to their citizens explaining the long term benefits of negotiating this crisis peacefully, rather than through the use of threats and force. The contemporary controversy in Ukraine could be successfully resolved by following the framework of the historic Helsinki accords and President Ford's personal leadership example. Like President Ford, today's leaders would do well to uphold the promises their countries have made and act as not as politicians, but as global statesmen.

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