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Through the Looking Glass: The Helsinki Final Act and the 1976 Election for President

SARAH B. SNYDER

The controversy surrounding the 1975 Helsinki Final Act made it an enduring issue in the 1976 campaign, and the political backlash against President Gerald R. Ford damaged his electoral chances. Ford's signature of the agreement, his continuation of détente, and his foreign policy more broadly may not have been decisive issues in his contests with Ronald Reagan and then Jimmy Carter, but they certainly were prominent throughout the election. Examining the influence of the Final Act on Ford's election campaign illuminates the extent to which a number of candidates sought to use popular opposition to the agreement to their advantage. Furthermore, it reveals how the 1976 presidential candidates, and Ford in particular, struggled to address growing questions about détente, human rights, and morality in foreign policy. Ford's failure to defend his signature of the Final Act adequately raised concerns about his foreign policy and personal leadership with the electorate.

With the benefit of hindsight, scholars increasingly ascribe an important role to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act in transforming Europe in the latter part of the Cold War. The agreement, initially dismissed as a concession to the Soviet Union, eventually proved beneficial to United States interests and is touted today as one of Gerald Ford's most significant legacies.¹ The immediate political backlash against Ford's signature of the agreement, however, became a lasting and damaging issue for his presidency. It left him vulnerable to attacks from the right and left, contributing to a tense fight for the Republican nomination in the primaries and ultimately a losing bid to be elected president. Ford exacerbated his predicament by failing to communicate the importance of the Final Act and significantly alienating millions with a glaring mischaracterisation of the relationship between the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe at the end of his campaign. Ironically, his principal opponents in the campaign, first former California governor Ronald Reagan and later

former Georgia governor Jimmy Carter, sharply criticised Ford's signature of the agreement but would both strongly advocate its implementation once in office.

Many political scientists have suggested the 1976 presidential election, like countless before it, turned on domestic issues.² Americans polled during October 1976 overwhelmingly cited economic issues such as inflation and unemployment as the most important problems facing the country.³ The salience of these domestic issues played a significant role in the presidential election, given that voters in 1976 strongly favored the Democrats to tackle such problems. For example, whereas 49 percent of respondents preferred Democrats to address inflation, only seven percent favored the Republicans.⁴ This disparity placed Ford at a considerable disadvantage in his campaign. Furthermore, Ford's decision to pardon former United States President Richard Nixon was an additional obstacle to his electoral chances.⁵

In this article, I argue the Helsinki Final Act was an enduring issue in the 1976 campaign.⁶ Ford's signature of the agreement, his continuation of détente, and his foreign policy more broadly may not have been the decisive issues in his contests with Reagan and then Carter, but they certainly were prominent throughout the election. Examining the influence of the Helsinki Final Act on Ford's election campaign, including his performance in the second debate, illuminates the extent to which a number of candidates sought to use popular opposition to the agreement to their advantage. Furthermore, it reveals how the candidates, and Ford in particular, struggled to address growing questions about détente, human rights, and morality in foreign policy. Ford's failure to defend his signature of the Helsinki Final Act adequately raised concerns about his foreign policy and personal leadership more broadly among the electorate.

The 1975 Helsinki Final Act was the culmination of three years of negotiations at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and contained principles governing East–West interactions in Europe. In addition to reaching an agreement on the inviolability of frontiers, which was the original impetus for the Soviet desire to hold the conference, the Helsinki Final Act committed CSCE states to respect human rights and facilitate human contacts across East–West borders. The principal line of criticism against Ford was that the United States had given away too much whilst requiring little of the Soviets in return. Opposition to Ford's actions in Helsinki lingered into the subsequent year based on two main currents. The first was rooted in the perception that the Helsinki Final Act legitimised Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and upset many groups with ties to the region, in particular Baltic–Americans who were concerned about the agreement's impact on official United States policy toward Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.⁷ Polish, Ukrainian, Slovak, Hungarian, Croatian, and other groups were similarly concerned about the implications of the agreement for Eastern Europe. In Ford's view, however, the opposition of many of these groups

was based primarily on misinformation: "Some of the ethnic groups like the Baltic states had the misunderstanding that the language [of the Helsinki Final Act] drew specific lines that prevented them from getting their independence, which was totally untrue...they had been misled by individuals who did not agree with the Accord."⁸ Concerns about the agreement remained, and the Helsinki Final Act became a point of contention between the White House and Eastern European Americans during Ford's election campaign.

The second source of criticism was general antagonism to détente, linkage, or agreements with the Soviets, which was fueled by developments such as the fighting in Angola, failure to reach a second strategic arms limitation agreement, and the fall of Saigon. The opposition was compounded by public relations efforts by Kissinger and Nixon that had overstated the promise of détente. A large contingent in Congress and the public disapproved of détente broadly, and the Final Act was perceived as an outgrowth of Soviet-American rapprochement.⁹ This created a double problem for the administration, as critics of détente rallied against the CSCE and those opposed to the CSCE joined the broader fight against détente. A coalition of Republican and Democratic conservatives opposed to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's policies, most prominently the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), caused significant domestic problems for Ford over the course of the 1976 campaign.¹⁰ Kissinger in particular was a flashpoint for criticism and was often blamed for having pressured Ford to sign the Helsinki Final Act for the sake of preserving détente. As Ford himself has noted, his staff was partly responsible for the impression that Helsinki was something that Kissinger had pressed him to do:

The trouble was that some members of the White House staff didn't view Helsinki as a significant accomplishment...They should have lauded the accord as a victory. Instead they intimated that it was "another Kissinger deal that was forced down the President's throat"; they started making excuses for it and this furthered speculation that the journey was ill-conceived.¹¹

Those who opposed détente linked their criticism of the CSCE to growing evidence that the Soviet Union was not fulfilling its Helsinki obligations. The antagonism was reflected in a range of editorial condemnations of Soviet repression of human rights activist Andrei Sakharov and other dissidents, especially in the wake of Sakharov's designation as the 1975 Nobel Peace Prize winner.¹² The *Cincinnati Enquirer* declared that the Soviets had, with their actions, "ripped up" the Helsinki Final Act.¹³ Various other editorial boards decried the "mockery" and "hollowness" of the Helsinki Final Act, Soviet "contempt" for its Helsinki commitments, and the "duplicity" of Soviet actions.¹⁴

Additional developments, including two in May 1976, kept the question of Soviet adherence to the Helsinki Final Act in the news. First, a group of Soviet citizens decided to form a group, the Public Group to Promote Fulfillment of the Helsinki Accords in the USSR, devoted to monitoring Soviet compliance with the Helsinki Final Act.¹⁵ Second, several days later Congress voted to establish a commission charged with measuring implementation of the agreement by its signatories.¹⁶ Further controversy erupted in June 1976 due to a Rowland Evans and Robert Novak column in which they accused the Ford administration of putting a deceptively rosy face on Soviet Helsinki implementation whilst decrying Soviet progress in confidential, diplomatic channels. The Evans and Novak column and their charge that Ford “either was ignoring or was unaware of reality” resonated with political observers as it fed on beliefs that American pursuit of détente had weakened its resolve against the Soviets.¹⁷ The first anniversary of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act also brought characterisations in the national media that the agreement was an “unfulfilled promise.”¹⁸

Political ambition, especially during a presidential campaign, also motivated criticism of Ford’s CSCE policy. In the scramble of the 1976 race, disagreement with the Helsinki Final Act proved politically popular. Some of the most prominent candidates, including perceived Democratic front-runner Senator Henry M. Jackson of Washington, were particularly strong in their opposition. Jackson had spent several years burnishing his image for a presidential run, including emphasising his interest in the issue of Soviet human rights abuses and amassing a significant war chest for the campaign—over \$1.1 million. Political columnist Jules Witcover, who chronicled the 1976 election campaign in his massive volume *Marathon*, termed Jackson “a sort of Democratic secretary of state,” reflecting his stature as by far the most prominent Democrat on foreign policy issues. Moreover, Jackson was particularly critical of détente, serving as an unofficial spokesperson for a group of ideologically like-minded members of Congress, often referred to as “Jackson Democrats” by the press.¹⁹ Known for the Jackson-Vanik amendment that put Soviet Jewish emigration on the American foreign policy agenda, Jackson regarded himself as a promoter of democracy and human rights internationally.²⁰ Jackson was explicitly critical of the decision to sign the Final Act, which he saw as a retreat by the West. Jackson questioned the strength of the Helsinki commitments and their chance of being implemented by Eastern European states.²¹ Ford’s perceived weakness on the issue guaranteed Helsinki would be a contentious issue throughout the campaign.

The circumstances of Ford’s ascension to the presidency left a wide opportunity to challenge him for the nomination. Although technically an incumbent, Ford had never run outside of his home district in Michigan, and there were concerns about how he would fare in a national campaign. More fundamentally, many conservatives, including Reagan, were frustrated

by his policies. In Ford's view, his decision to go to Helsinki, among other controversies early in his presidency, made a primary challenge from Reagan "inevitable."²²

Reagan's entrance into the race garnered the attention of the media and a large portion of the Republican Party with his broad critique that Kissinger was so focused on maintaining détente with the Soviets that he neglected American national interests. As part of his criticism of Ford's pursuit of détente, Reagan opposed the Helsinki Final Act for a number of reasons. First, Reagan alleged the agreement had "put the American seal of approval on the Red Army's Second World War conquests."²³ Second, Reagan was broadly critical of negotiating with communist countries because, in his view: "violating agreements is standard operating procedure for communists."²⁴ In Reagan's nationally syndicated radio commentary, he railed against Soviet failure to adhere to the Helsinki Final Act, criticising the denial of exit visas in the Soviet Union: "Like yesterday's newspaper The Helsinki Pact should be used for wrapping garbage."²⁵ He also charged Ford with abandoning human rights. Reagan vowed to change the Soviet-American relationship if elected: "There is little doubt in my mind that the Soviet Union will not stop taking advantage of détente until it sees that the American people have elected a new President and appointed a new Secretary of State."²⁶

The persistence of Helsinki as an issue in the 1976 campaign can also be attributed in part to the eruption of the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine controversy, which raised similar issues regarding the United States relationship with Eastern Europe. Columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak coined the term in March 1976 when they reported that National Security Council staff member Helmut C. Sonnenfeldt had made ambiguous remarks about the relationship between the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, which could be interpreted to concede Soviet domination there.²⁷ Reagan criticised the alleged Sonnenfeldt Doctrine, saying it sent a message to Eastern European people to "give up any claim of national sovereignty and simply become a part of the Soviet Union." In response to the controversy, Kissinger rebutted the underlying charge, declaring, "We do not accept a sphere of influence of any country, anywhere, and emphatically we reject a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe."²⁸ The storm over the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine, however, damaged Ford's image with Eastern European Americans and colored reactions to Ford's debate performance in the fall.

Some involved in the 1976 presidential campaign have spoken about the resonance of Reagan's criticisms of Ford's foreign policy. They note that Reagan's campaign gained momentum as it shifted from a critique on domestic issues to foreign policy, in particular that Kissinger and Ford were "soft" on the Soviet Union.²⁹ Reagan's emphasis on foreign policy may have improved his numbers as the campaign progressed, especially in the North Carolina and Florida primaries. His critique also laid the groundwork for Carter's attacks on Ford's foreign policy in the general election.

In response to Reagan's many criticisms, Ford defended his record and took steps to redirect the political discourse on Helsinki and his foreign policy. One administration strategy had been to counter the critique of détente by redefining it publicly as "containment" of the Soviet Union. In addition, Kissinger shifted from discussing détente as a "constructive relationship" in 1974 to describing it as a "competitive relationship" in 1976.³⁰ Finally, Ford gave up and struck the term "détente" from his campaign. In a speech in Peoria, Illinois, he said explicitly, "We are going to forget the use of the word détente."³¹

Wary that lingering concerns about the Helsinki accords would weaken Ford's electoral support, Special Assistant for Ethnic Affairs in the Office of Public Liaison Myron Kuropas argued that Ford and Kissinger needed to clarify their stance to leaders of Eastern European ethnic groups.³² Members of Ford's staff encouraged more events to assuage different groups still upset about Helsinki, such as his attendance at Solidarity Day in New York City to enhance his political support in the Jewish community.³³ His attempts to alleviate Eastern European-American concerns also included receiving the Ukrainian "Man of the Year" award and accepting the role of Honorary Patron of ESTO '76, an Estonian celebration of the American Bicentennial.³⁴ In addition, Ford appeared before the Polish American Congress national conference in Philadelphia in September 1976 to assert that a Sonnenfeldt Doctrine did not exist and that the United States was "totally opposed to spheres of influence."³⁵

Ford and Reagan endured a lengthy, demanding primary season and persistently disagreed on foreign policy and the Helsinki Final Act. The race was so close as the convention approached that Ford had to tolerate the indignity of acquiescing to a party platform plank that criticised his foreign policy. Ford was "furious" about the "Morality in Foreign Policy" plank that Reagan proposed, but some of his advisors suggested that he allow it in order to avoid drawing further attention to Reagan's agenda.³⁶ The plank explicitly criticised détente, Ford's refusal to invite exiled Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn to the White House, the Helsinki agreement, unilateral concessions on arms control, and "secret" agreements. The plank specifically condemned the Helsinki Final Act: "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."³⁷ It also included sharp criticism of Kissinger, which was intended to inspire Reagan supporters who reviled Kissinger as well as to embarrass Ford.³⁸ In the balloting at the convention in Kansas City, Ford won the nomination by 117 votes, but the primary season and the fight over the party platform indicated how weak his popular support was and demonstrated his vulnerabilities on a number of issues including détente and Helsinki. Ford's fight with Reagan badly damaged his prospects, and he began the general election down twenty points in the polls.³⁹

Foreign policy, human rights, and the Helsinki Final Act were also prominent issues in the Democratic nomination contest and would remain important in the general election campaign. Despite early indications that Jackson would be a strong contender, as one observer pointed out, “the Democratic Party’s primary voters were not going to elect an anti-Soviet hard-liner in 1976.”⁴⁰ Jackson’s interests and strengths did not fit the needs of an electorate disillusioned in the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate and ready for change. Surprising most political observers, the Democrats instead turned to Jimmy Carter, a peanut farmer and former Georgia governor, to lead their party. Carter was seen as an outsider, which appealed to many who were weary of the Nixon and Ford administrations.

The Carter campaign reprised many of Reagan’s criticisms of Ford’s foreign policy, with Carter disparaging Ford on a number of counts, including his ceding control of foreign policymaking to Kissinger, the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine, and the Helsinki agreement.⁴¹ Carter was sharply critical of the Final Act early in the campaign, saying in March 1976: “At Helsinki, we signed an agreement approving the takeover of Eastern Europe. I would be very much tougher in the following years (in negotiations) with the Soviet Union.”⁴² At other times, he called Helsinki a “mistake” and declared that there was “no reason for us to participate in the Helsinki conference.”⁴³ Carter criticised Ford’s signature of the agreement and said it had given the Soviets a “tremendous diplomatic victory.”⁴⁴ He was even more explicit in an infamous *Playboy* interview, in which he condemned the entire CSCE negotiations, saying: “I never saw any reason we should be involved in the Helsinki meetings at all.” He went on to say:

We added the stature of our presence and signature on an agreement, that, in effect, ratified the take-over of Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union. We got very little, if anything in return. . . Mr. Brezhnev was able to celebrate the major achievement of his diplomatic life.⁴⁵

Carter’s harsh criticism of Ford may surprise some readers who are more familiar with his later staunch support of Helsinki monitors such as Anatoly Shcharansky and Yuri Orlov and his administration’s strong stance at the 1977–78 Belgrade CSCE Follow-up Meeting that reviewed implementation of the Helsinki Final Act.⁴⁶ Carter’s position on the agreement, however, clearly evolved over the course of the campaign and his first year in office.

The Carter campaign later shifted to emphasising problems with Helsinki compliance and alleged that the Ford administration had “looked the other way” on Soviet failures to implement the Helsinki Final Act fully.⁴⁷ Scholars have often attributed this to pressure from Congress and specifically from the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.⁴⁸ Carter’s closest foreign policy aide on the campaign and later his National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, however, had a long record of support for the CSCE.⁴⁹

Recent scholarship indicates that Brzezinski recognised the value of the agreement and convinced Carter that he should not criticise the content of the accord but rather focus on the Ford administration's reluctance to pressure the Soviets to adhere to it. In Carter's new view, the Soviets had not complied sufficiently with their Basket Three obligations, and the Ford administration had not pressed the Soviets hard enough on their commitments.⁵⁰ Reflecting Carter's position, the Democratic platform read, "We should continually remind the Soviet Union, by word and conduct, of its commitments in Helsinki to the free flow of peoples and ideas and of how offensive we and other free peoples find its violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."⁵¹ Carter integrated complaints about Soviet nonimplementation of the Helsinki Final Act with an emphasis on human rights to his campaign.

Carter accentuated human rights as early as the announcement of his candidacy for the presidency in December 1974, and over time, the protection of human rights became a central issue in the campaign, spurred not only by the Helsinki Final Act but by other high-profile developments and a desire to bring together different wings of the Democratic Party.⁵² A number of other factors, some of which were politically beneficial, drove Carter's increasing emphasis on human rights over the course of the campaign. First, from a political expediency perspective, Carter emphasised human rights because to do so at the time was politically popular.⁵³ In the run-up to the convention, Carter's team had recognised that focusing on human rights was a way to build consensus within the Democratic Party. In the course of the campaign, Carter saw human rights as an issue that appealed to conservatives who criticised détente as morally bankrupt and liberals concerned about the morality of United States actions in Vietnam and American support for right-wing dictators.⁵⁴ It also strengthened his appeal to ethnic communities. In an undated memo, his aides wrote: "To groups like the Poles, Ukrainians...and others human rights is the single most important political issue in the field of foreign policy.... The issue is of major importance to groups like the Coalition For a Democratic Majority in the Jackson-Moynihan wing of the party."⁵⁵ Carter wanted to gain political support and re-create the domestic foreign policy consensus that had allegedly existed after the Second World War but collapsed in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In the aftermath of Vietnam, Carter's support for human rights also could enhance American international prestige. Brzezinski saw it as important for the United States' place in the world: "I felt strongly that a major emphasis on human rights...would advance America's global interests."⁵⁶ National Security Council staff member William Odom described Carter's human rights policy as "a very pragmatic tactic, to really beat up morally on the Soviets" in the Cold War.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Carter was also able to use the issue to distinguish his agenda from Ford and Kissinger's foreign policy, which was increasingly under fire from international and domestic critics.⁵⁸

Third, external actors such as members of Congress, his own advisors, and other concerned individuals influenced Carter. According to one observer, Democratic Representative Dante Fascell of Florida played an important role in Carter's emphasis on human rights, suggesting talking points for his inaugural address and urging Carter to shape his discussion of morality in foreign policy by explicitly addressing human rights issues.⁵⁹ Other Congressional pressure, especially from the Democratic-controlled House International Relations Subcommittee on International Organizations, helped focus attention on the role of human rights in foreign policy.⁶⁰ Among his close advisers, Brzezinski's hostile outlook toward communist governments in Eastern Europe significantly influenced Carter's attitude toward the Soviet Union with regard to human rights and the CSCE.⁶¹ Furthermore, although they had less clout than policymakers, Soviet refuseniks, Soviet dissidents, and other affected parties collectively shaped the president's foreign policy agenda.⁶²

Beyond political motivations, Carter's emphasis was fundamentally grounded in his personal worldview, which included an inner moral commitment to human rights that then-Supreme Allied Commander in Europe Alexander Haig termed "evangelical."⁶³ In addition, Carter firmly believed in the civil rights movement in the United States, and observers have suggested that this dedication influenced his support for human rights internationally.⁶⁴ Carter's genuine interest in human rights contrasted sharply with Kissinger's emphasis on *realpolitik*. Interestingly, in his criticism of Ford and Kissinger's foreign policy, Carter echoed the Reagan campaign's argument that the United States needed to incorporate morality into its foreign policy.

Carter's amended views on human rights, and specifically Basket Three of the Helsinki agreement, enabled him to capitalise on the circumstances of the second presidential debate, which focused on foreign policy. In advance of the debate, Brzezinski had advised Carter to change his approach to the Final Act. He wrote a memorandum to Carter explaining how he could put Ford "on the defensive":

Do not attack the Agreement as a whole. The so-called "Basket III" gives us the right—for the first time—to insist on respect for human rights without this constituting interference in the internal affairs of communist states. . . you should hammer away at the proposition that the Republicans have been indifferent to this opportunity.

Brzezinski also argued that the borders provisions of Basket One were not necessarily detrimental to U.S. interests.⁶⁵ In addition, criticising ongoing Ford policy could be more effective with voters than fixating on a past decision.

The debate, the second of three, was held on October 6 in San Francisco. Ford's debate preparation materials show that his staff devoted considerable time to preparing him for questions on the Helsinki agreement and the

Sonnenfeldt Doctrine.⁶⁶ Throughout this period, the Ford administration walked a fine line between defending its signature of the Helsinki Final Act and criticising the Soviets for not having fully implemented it, revealing uneasiness about the American CSCE position and setting the stage for complicated questions at the debate.⁶⁷ A draft answer to charges that the Helsinki Final Act gave away too much to the Soviets reads, “To say that my policies accept Soviet domination over Eastern Europe is patent nonsense. The United States recognises neither spheres of influence nor the hegemony of any people over another and it never will.”⁶⁸ Ford, however, would answer this question far less eloquently at the actual debate. In his memoirs, Press Secretary Ron Nessen argues that Ford was so coached and prepared to disavow the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine that he ended up denying Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, as opposed to refuting United States acceptance of this domination.⁶⁹ In addition, Ford suggests that he was distracted and “failed to spend as much time preparing for the second debate as I should have.”⁷⁰

At the debate, *New York Times* Associate Editor Max Frankel asked Ford to talk about the United States relationship with the USSR, and his questions amounted to little less than a suggestion that the Soviets were winning the Cold War. In response, Ford said: “I believe that we have negotiated with the Soviet Union since I’ve been President from a position of strength.” He then addressed the portion of Frankel’s question that asked about Helsinki and the Soviet role in Europe, saying:

Now, what has been accomplished by the Helsinki agreement? Number one, we have an agreement where they notify us and we notify them of any military maneuvers that are to be undertaken. They have done it in both cases where they’ve done so. There is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, and there never will be under the Ford administration.⁷¹

Frankel, with a follow-up question, offered Ford an opportunity to clarify his statement, “Did I understand you to say, sir, that the Russians are not using Eastern Europe as their own sphere of influence and occupying most of the countries there and making sure with their groups that it is a Communist zone?”⁷² Ford, however, did not realise the need to back-track from his comments and instead more vehemently asserted his position. He later wrote that he “failed to recognize” that he was “stepping through a mine-field.” At the time, he said:

I don’t believe, Mr. Frankel, that the Yugoslavians consider themselves dominated by the Soviet Union. I don’t believe the Rumanians consider themselves dominated by the Soviet Union. I don’t believe that the Poles believe themselves dominated by the Soviet Union.

When offered the opportunity to rebut, Carter acted quickly: "I would like to see Mr. Ford convince the Polish-Americans and the Czech-Americans and Hungarian-Americans in this country that those countries don't live under the domination and supervision of the Soviet Union behind the Iron Curtain."⁷³ Ford's answer began a controversy that would stall his campaign for days and later lead observers to ask if it had cost him the election.

Although not immediately apparent, Ford's comments would prove quite damaging to his campaign. Nessen reports that Scowcroft "grimaced," but the other staffers and press watching the debate together did not signal any recognition of a misstep.⁷⁴ The nation's editorial pages, on the other hand, were quick to criticise Ford's comments, with the *Los Angeles Times* asserting that, Ford's answer represented "either a momentary lapse of reason or evidence of a profound misunderstanding of one of the most important world security problems."⁷⁵ Michael Raoul-Duval, who worked on Ford's debate preparation team, charges the press manufactured the controversy, highlighting problems with his remarks that otherwise might have escaped the average television viewer.⁷⁶ He argues that in the test groups carried out during the second debate, there was no impact from Ford's remark on Poland. In several subsequent test groups, all conducted before respondents had encountered news reports, they still did not register concern about Ford's remark. It was only after 24 hours of media exposure that those queried developed negative reactions against Ford. Similarly, in an initial poll by Republican pollster Robert Teeter, respondents indicated that Ford had won the debate. When polled a day later, however, they picked Carter 61 to 19 percent.⁷⁷ Pollster George Gallup described Ford's comments in the second debate as the "most decisive moment in the campaign."⁷⁸ Analyses of the 1976 debates point to Ford's statement as the only instance in which mention of an issue heightened voters' attention to the subject. Ford's misstep, thus, drew voters' focus again to the controversy over the Helsinki Final Act, broadening the portion of voters focused on and concerned about Helsinki-related issues.⁷⁹

Ford's debate gaffe was a factor in his electoral defeat, taking its toll in particular in several days of campaign momentum.⁸⁰ The controversy resurrected questions about his control of foreign policy and complaints that Kissinger led him too far toward détente, Helsinki, and other policies. The blunder also damaged Ford because it reinforced the charge made by Reagan and Carter that his mental abilities were not at the presidential level, as Ford's mistake suggested he was out of touch with the realities of European foreign relations.⁸¹ This theme was significant because it fit with the public perceptions of Ford as at times clumsy and bumbling. United States President Lyndon Johnson had once famously remarked, "Jerry Ford is so dumb he can't fart and chew gum at the same time."⁸²

In addition, by failing immediately to admit his mistake, Ford allowed the issue to fester, raising further questions about his abilities

and stalling his campaign.⁸³ Raoul-Duval acknowledged in retrospect that it was an error not to push Ford to tackle the issue immediately.⁸⁴ Ford's staff tried to minimise the fallout, but he let significant time pass, especially for the final weeks of a presidential campaign, before adequately addressing his gaffe. In White House Chief of Staff Dick Cheney's words at the time, "[Ford] is stubborn. He doesn't want to clean it up."⁸⁵ Cheney, campaign staffer Stu Spencer, Scowcroft, and Raoul-Duval all met with the press to try to set the record straight on Ford's understanding of the situation in Eastern Europe, but the press was not satisfied with his staff's attempted clarifications.⁸⁶ Ford's aides convinced him to address the problem to some extent in a speech at University of Southern California the morning after the debate; at their instigation, he said, "Last night in the debate I spoke of America's firm support for the aspirations for independence of the nations of Eastern Europe. The United States has never conceded and never will concede their domination by the Soviet Union."⁸⁷

As Carter continued to draw attention to the issue, Ford's staff worried that his debate comments could damage their candidate's support, particularly in Illinois and other northern industrial states heavily populated with ethnic voters.⁸⁸ Carter had recognised the opportunity to criticise Ford's record immediately, saying that the Helsinki agreement "may have been a good agreement at the beginning," but that under the Ford administration "we have failed to enforce" it.⁸⁹ Furthermore, in Salt Lake City after the debate, Carter said that Ford had "disgraced our country by claiming that Eastern Europe is free of the domination of the Soviet Union...It either introduces ignorance on Mr. Ford's part or he stated something he knew not to be true."⁹⁰ Having discovered the value of the Helsinki Final Act as an issue in the campaign, Carter pledged that if elected president, he would move human rights and Helsinki implementation to the top of his agenda with the Soviet Union.⁹¹

Ford had a subsequent opportunity to clear up the controversy when asked about his opinion on "Communist rule" in Eastern Europe the next day at a breakfast in Los Angeles. In his response, Ford referred to Soviet domination of Poland as an "allegation," a characterisation that only exacerbated his problem as the press jumped on this new comment. Nessen's deputy John Carlson characterised the reaction of reporters at the nearby press center who had just heard Ford's remarks as "wild." He said, "The reporters are racing around the press room, laughing and playing their tapes over and over and filing bulletins saying the president put his foot even deeper into his mouth!"⁹²

That afternoon Cheney and Spencer convinced Ford that he had only worsened his situation and needed to correct the record with the press to end the distracting and damaging issue. Therefore Ford read a statement that said:

Perhaps I could have been more precise in what I said concerning Soviet domination of Poland. I, fortunately, had the opportunity of being in Poland in 1975. . . . I recognize that there are Polish—or in Poland there are Soviet divisions, but anybody who has looked straight in the eye at thousands of fine Polish people knows that their desire for liberty and freedom is just as great as the desire for liberty and freedom of the American people.

It is tragic that the Soviet Union does have some divisions in Poland. It is a tragedy that I hope in the future the Poles will be able to find another solution because the unquenchable spirit of the Polish people is something that I admire and respect.

I join the Polish Americans in this country who know that their ancestral home is the home that where for centuries there was freedom, and we want freedom for their relatives and their loved ones and their people in the land that they came from.⁹³

Ford's disavowal did not stop the Carter campaign's attacks. Carter, referencing failed 1968 presidential candidate George W. Romney's poor choice of words, said shortly thereafter, "Apparently when Mr. Ford went to Poland as happened to Mr. Romney last time, he was brainwashed."⁹⁴ Furthermore, Vice Presidential candidate Walter Mondale raised Ford's comments in his debate with Senator Robert Dole, Ford's running mate. Mondale termed Ford's original statement to be "one of the most outrageous statements made by a President in recent political history." He also used the opportunity to draw a distinction between the Ford administration's attitude toward compliance with the Helsinki Final Act and how Carter would press the issue if elected, "we would push that part of the Helsinki accord known as Basket Three, which requires much more opening up, in people-to-people contact, and informational contact."⁹⁵

Ford's answer raised further concerns about his leadership with ethnic interest groups such as the Polish American Congress whose president Aloysius Mazewski called the White House for clarification after the debate. He said, "Our people do usually vote Democratic, but we were aware that many of them were not enthusiastic about Carter and were going to vote for President Ford. I think that many of them will go back to the Democratic side now."⁹⁶ Viktor Viksins of the Captive Nations Committee expressed the bewilderment of many when he remarked, "There are no free countries in Eastern Europe and the President should be the first to know that."⁹⁷ After Ford's partial retractions, he set out to mend relationships with different Eastern European leaders such as Mazewski whom he called from Air Force One to try to resolve the situation, apologising for the "misunderstanding."⁹⁸ Yet, others such as Lev Dobriansky, president of the Congress of Ukrainians in the United States, were not placated and threw their support from Ford to Carter.⁹⁹

Despite Ford's efforts to clarify the meaning of his remarks, staffers believed that given the close proximity of Election Day, more steps needed to be taken. Assistant to the President for Public Liaison William J. Baroody arranged a week's worth of events to try to defuse the outcry, including a meeting with Eastern European leaders, a speech, and a bill signing ceremony, all intended to appease Eastern European concerns.¹⁰⁰ To stem the criticism "every conceivable East European ethnic group was invited to the White House, and there were countless meetings and ceremonies with Hungarians, Poles, Czechs, and so forth," according to William Hyland of the National Security Council.¹⁰¹ Ford met with Eastern European leaders on October 12 and conceded: "The original mistake was mine. I did not express myself clearly—I admit it."¹⁰²

Nonetheless, some analysts think Ford's debate gaffe damaged his standing with ethnic interest groups and Eastern European Americans who were particularly focused on foreign policy toward Eastern Europe. Although the Democratic Party, with its strong support of labor unions and political base in northern urban centers, traditionally won a greater share of the ethnic vote, Nixon had garnered 52 percent of the Catholic vote in the 1972 election, a sharp increase over the 33 percent he won in 1968. These numbers reflect more than a weak Democratic candidate in 1972 but also a growing conservatism among ethnic voters. White, ethnic voters in the North were shifting away from the Democratic Party to the Republicans in reaction against busing, integration, changing neighborhoods, unemployment, affirmative action, the counterculture, high taxes, and feminism, among other factors. In contrast to Nixon in 1972, Ford won only 41 percent. According to a *New York Times*-CBS poll, between September 6 and mid-October, Carter gained 15 percentage points among Americans with ties to Eastern Europe, indicating concern among that group about Ford's record. Ford's numbers in the East European community recovered somewhat by Election Day, but his campaign was damaged by the debate controversy as it deprived him of important momentum and resurrected lingering concerns about his mental fitness.¹⁰³

In the end, Ford lost the election as a result of many factors including the Helsinki Final Act.¹⁰⁴ In addition to the controversy surrounding Helsinki and the perceived imbalance in the Soviet-American détente relationship, other foreign policy issues such as the specter of Panamanian sovereignty over the canal and the situations in Angola and Rhodesia were debated during the campaign. Domestic controversies such as Watergate and Ford's subsequent pardon of Nixon, however, were far more significant as they created lingering bitterness toward Ford throughout his time in office. Carter, with his outsider persona, was able to capitalise on voter fatigue with the scandals of the Nixon and Ford administrations. Finally, polling evidence demonstrates economic problems such as inflation and unemployment weighed heavily on voters' minds and were decisive in the election, as the public

believed the Democrats were better suited to alleviate the country's economic woes.

Examining the enduring influence of the Helsinki Final Act on the 1976 presidential election offers an important contribution to the debate surrounding why presidential candidates devote such attention to foreign policy issues despite evidence that few elections are decided on those questions. As this article has shown, foreign policy and the controversy surrounding the Helsinki agreement were indeed significant issues in the 1976 campaign. Ford had an opportunity to benefit from the Helsinki Final Act, but he was unable to frame his agreement to the accord's terms in the context of heightened interest in human rights, as Carter would later do. Instead, Ford's inability to identify and explain the potential value of the Helsinki Final Act weakened his standing with the electorate.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, Ford did not effectively rebut charges that his pursuit of détente with the Soviet Union constituted an immoral foreign policy. These failures were manifested most dramatically in Ford's second debate performance but colored the electorate's view of his leadership throughout the campaign. Only in retrospect, long after the campaign had been lost, would Ford comment that he was "prouder than ever to have signed the Helsinki accords" because they "were a major factor in bringing about the human rights revolt in Poland, Czechoslovakia, [and] Hungary and current ramifications in the Soviet Union."¹⁰⁶

Under Carter, the Helsinki Final Act, which had proved so controversial with lawmakers, Eastern European ethnic interest groups, and the American public during the Ford administration quickly became a centerpiece of his administration's emphasis on human rights in foreign policy. Carter's election strengthened United States CSCE policy and the overall significance of the Helsinki process to the Cold War. Then, as he had in his 1976 fight against Ford, Reagan criticised United States participation in the CSCE and the Helsinki Final Act during his 1980 campaign against Carter. Yet, once in office, Reagan and his administration recognised the Helsinki process could be an effective tool in its contest with the East, much as Carter had four years previously. Thus, the Reagan administration cemented Carter's transformation of the United States role within the CSCE and pursued policies in line with Carter's strategy throughout Reagan's presidency. The conversion of the CSCE and the Helsinki Final Act from a political liability to a heralded force in an East–West relationship was essential to the later influence of the Helsinki process on the end of the Cold War.

NOTES

The Gerald R. Ford Foundation generously supported research for this article.

1. Proponents of this view are largely former members of the Ford administration, though at Ford's funeral others such as President George W. Bush also espoused this interpretation. Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New

York, 1996), pp. 87–94; Dick Cheney, “The Ford Presidency in Perspective,” in Bernard J. Firestone and Alexej Ugrinsky, eds., *Gerald R. Ford and the Politics of Post-Watergate America* (New York, 1992), pp. 5, 671; “Henry A. Kissinger’s Eulogy for President Ford,” *New York Times*, 2 January 2007; and Press Release, “President Bush Attends Funeral Service for President Ford at the National Cathedral,” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070102.html> (accessed 9 April 2008).

2. See for example, John H. Aldrich, John L. Sullivan, and Eugene Borgida, “Foreign Affairs and Issue Voting: Do Presidential Candidates ‘Waltz Before a Blind Audience?’” *The American Political Science Review*, 83, 1 (March 1989), pp. 124, 131.

3. Gallup Poll, “US Public Opinion on Election 1976—Most Important Problem,” October 1976, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut.

4. Herbert B. Asher, *Presidential Elections and American Politics: Voters, Candidates, and Campaigns Since 1952*, revised edition (Homewood, IL, 1980), p. 203.

5. Ford’s decision may have halted any initial period of goodwill. Ford’s approval rating dropped from 71 percent after his assumption of the presidency to 50 percent after he pardoned Nixon. Similarly, the percentage of those who disapproved of his job performance jumped from only 3 percent in mid-August 1974 to 28 percent by late September. Asher, *Presidential Elections*, pp. 203–5; and “Job Performance Ratings for President Ford,” Public Opinion Archives, Roper Center.

6. In 1990, Leo Ribuffo analyzed Ford’s gaffe in his second presidential debate with Jimmy Carter, arguing Ford’s comments about the Soviet domination of Poland needed to be examined in light of the controversy surrounding the so-called Sonnenfeldt Doctrine. I agree with Ribuffo’s analysis, especially on the extent to which Ford’s debate performance stalled his campaign momentum and contributed to his electoral defeat. At the same time, the controversy surrounding Ford’s decision to sign the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and his electoral opponents’ use of this issue needs greater attention. Leo P. Ribuffo, “Is Poland a Soviet Satellite?: Gerald Ford, the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine, and the Election of 1976,” *Diplomatic History*, 14 (1990), pp. 385–403.

7. The United States had not recognised the Soviet acquisition of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

8. Amy Schapiro, *Millicent Fenwick: Her Way* (New Brunswick, 2003), p. 165.

9. Telegram, AmEmbassy Moscow to SecState, 8 November 1975, USSR – SDT – to SECSTATE – EXDIS (11), Box 21, President’s Country Files for Europe and Canada, National Security Adviser, [Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan – hereafter GRFL].

10. Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American–Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, revised edition (Washington, 1994), pp. 595–600.

11. Ford, *Time to Heal*, p. 301; and Schapiro, *Millicent Fenwick*, p. 166.

12. The refusal to allow Sakharov to accept his prize in Oslo demonstrated to many observers the “selective” nature of Soviet fulfillment of the terms of the agreement. Editorial, *Minneapolis Tribune*, 14 November 1975, in Judith F. Buncher, ed., *Human Rights & American Diplomacy, 1975–77* (New York, 1977), p. 61.

13. Editorial, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 10 December 1975 in *Ibid.*, p. 62.

14. Editorial, *Oregonian*, 13 November 1975, Editorial, *Detroit News*, 14 November 1975, *The State*, 22 November 1975, Editorial, *Cleveland Press*, 14 November 1975, all *Ibid.*, pp. 62–64

15. Reuters, “Soviet Dissidents Unite to Monitor Rights Violations,” *New York Times*, 14 May 1976, 11; “Soviet Dissident Warned on Rights Unit,” *New York Times*, 16 May 1976, p. 3.

16. AP, “House Votes to Establish Panel on Helsinki Accords,” *New York Times*, 18 May 1976, p. 8.

17. SecState to USDEL, 22 June 1976, Folder 5, Box 11, Records Of Helmut Sonnenfeldt, 1955–1977, Lot Files, Record Group 59 [National Archives, College Park, Maryland]; Rowland Evans and Robert Nowak, “Moscow vs. Helsinki,” *Washington Post*, 21 June 1976, p. A23; Clift to Scowcroft, 21 June 1976, IT 104 CSCE 6/1/761/20/77, Box 14, White House Central Files, GRFL.

18. Leonard H. Marks, “The Unfulfilled Promise of Helsinki,” *Washington Post*, 1 August 1976, p. 33; Peter Reddaway, “Is the Promise of Helsinki Only That?” *Chicago Tribune*, 1 August 1976, p. A2.

19. Jackson Democrats were fervently anti-communist, strongly supported increased military spending, and known for their liberal views on social issues. Jules Witcover, *Marathon: The Pursuit of the Presidency, 1972–1976* (New York, 1977), pp. 157, 161; John Sinclair Petifer Robson, *Henry Jackson, The Jackson-Vanik Amendment and Détente: Ideology, Ideas, and United States Foreign Policy in the Nixon Era* (PhD. Dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 1989), p. 55; John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs, 1945–1994* (New Haven, 1995), pp. 15–16.

20. Roberts G. Kaufman, *Henry M. Jackson: A Life in Politics* (Seattle, 2000), p. 5.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 293.

22. Ford, *Time to Heal*, p. 307; Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York, 1992), p. 664; William Hyland, *Mortal Rivals* (New York, 1987), p. 140.
23. Ribuffo, "Soviet Satellite?" p. 394.
24. "Indochina # 2," April 1975, in Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson and Martin Anderson, eds., *Reagan In His Own Hand: The Writings of Ronald Reagan that Reveal His Revolutionary Vision for America* (New York, 2001), p. 49.
25. "Soviet Visas," 30 November 1976, in Skinner et. al., *In His Own Hand*, p. 144.
26. Witcover, *Marathon*, pp. 402, 404.
27. Sonnenfeldt has long denied such an interpretation. Ribuffo, "Soviet Satellite?" pp. 392–93; Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, pp. 549–50.
28. Robert D. Schulzinger, "The Decline of Détente," in Firestone and Ugrinsky, *Post-Watergate America*, p. 415.
29. Jonathan Moore and Janet Fraser, eds. *Campaign for President: The Managers Look at '76* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 46; Bret A. Rockman, "Presidents, Opinion, and Institutional Leadership," in David A. Deese, ed., *The New Politics of American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1994), pp. 63–64; and Robert T. Hartmann, *Palace Politics: An Inside Account of the Ford Years* (New York, 1980), p. 337.
30. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, pp. 604–05.
31. *Ibid.*; and Peter Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: The Tragedy and Promise of America in the 1970s* (New York, 1982), pp. 165–66.
32. Kuropas to Scowcroft, 9 June 1976, CO 1-5 Europe (Eastern), Box 5, White House Central Files, GRFL.
33. Lissy to Nicholson and attachments, 23 March 1976, Soviet Jews-Solidarity Day, NYC, 5/2/76, Box 42, David H. Lissy Files, GRFL.
34. Remarks, Ukrainian Congress Committee, 24 January 1976, Box 6, Myron Kuropas Files, GRFL; "To Americans of Estonian Ancestry," 19 February 1976, CO 1-4 Communist Bloc 8/9/74–3/31/76, Box 5, White House Central Files, GRFL.
35. Donald Pienkos, *For Your Freedom Through Ours: Polish American Efforts on Poland's Behalf, 1863–1991* (New York, 1991), p. 351.
36. Ford, *Time to Heal*, p. 398.
37. *Ibid.*; Witcover, *Marathon*, p. 485.
38. The American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organisations planned a June 1975 banquet to honor Solzhenitsyn. The State Department and National Security Council, however, advised against Ford's attendance. Poor White House management of Ford's decision to decline the invitation engendered political controversy.
39. By the end of the first debate, Ford had closed that gap to ten points. Ribuffo, "Soviet Satellite?" p. 398.
40. Kaufman, *Jackson*, p. 316.
41. Hargrove memorandum to Eizenstat and Holbrooke, 29 August 1976, Folder 9, Box 8, Cyrus R. and Grace Sloane Vance Papers, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.
42. "Carter Quotes on Eastern Europe," Carter on Foreign Policy (1), Box 25, Michael Raoul-Duval Papers, GRFL.
43. Reuters, "Carter on Helsinki Documents," 10 October 1976, European Question, 1976–1980, Box 251, Old Code Subject Files, Soviet Red Archives, Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute, Open Society Archives, Budapest, Hungary.
44. William Korey, *The Promises We Keep*, p. 35.
45. Transcript Excerpt, Folder 7, Box 8, Vance Papers.
46. Sarah B. Snyder, *The Helsinki Process, American Foreign Policy, and the End of the Cold War* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Georgetown University 2006), pp. 153–90.
47. Carter to Wurtman, 16 September 1976, Human Rights, Box 10, Myron Kuropas Files, GRFL. Carter's criticism was effective politically because as Carter administration Press Secretary Jody Powell said, "It gave us a club that he could use against Ford for not enforcing it and against the Russians for not living up to it." William C. Green, "Human Rights and Detente," *Ukrainian Quarterly*, 36, 2 (1980), p. 142.
48. The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe is a joint legislative and executive body charged with monitoring implementation of the Helsinki Final Act.
49. Madeleine K. Albright and Alfred Friendly, Jr., "Helsinki and Human Rights," in Edmund S. Muskie, Kenneth Rush, and Kenneth W. Thompson, eds. *The President, The Congress and Foreign Policy*

(Lanham, MD, 1986), p. 304; Korey, *The Promises We Keep*, p. 35; Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Observations on East–West Relations: Détente in the '70s," *Foreign Policy* (January 3, 1970), p. 18; Patrick Vaughan, "Zbigniew Brzezinski and the Helsinki Final Act," in Leopoldo Nuti, ed., *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: From Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975–1985* (New York, 2009), pp. 11–14.

50. Basket Three of the Helsinki Final Act included measures to increase contacts through family reunifications, bi-national marriages, and travel. John Dumbrell, *The Carter Presidency: A Re-evaluation* (New York, 1993), p. 118. Carter, perhaps in response to Brzezinski's memorandum, did lessen his criticism of the agreement, although he continued to assert that as president he would not have signed it. Reuters, "Carter on Helsinki Documents," 10 October 1976, European Question, 1976–1980, Box 251, Old Code Subject Files, Soviet Red Archives, Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute, Open Society Archives.

51. "Human Rights and the Jackson Amendment," Carter on Foreign Policy (1), Box 25, Michael Raoul-Duval Papers, GRFL. According to Deputy National Security Adviser David Aaron, the real impetus to Carter's strong push on human rights shortly after his inauguration was the Soviet crackdown on dissidents beginning in November 1977. David Aaron Interview, 15 December 1980, White House Staff Exit Interviews, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

52. Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York, 1982), p. 143. For example, Sakharov highlighted the issue by writing openly to Carter and Ford, urging them to do more to support human rights in the world. *Arkhiv Samizdata* 2645, Human Rights, 1974–1976, Box 689, Old Code Subject Files, Soviet Red Archives [Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute, Open Society Archives]; Clift to Scowcroft, 16 September 1976, PR 13 9/1/76–10/31/76, Box 89, White House Central Files, GRFL; "Sakharov Appeal to U.S. Presidential Candidates," 16 September 1976, Human Rights, Box 10, Myron Kuropas Files, GRFL.

53. Joshua Muravchik, *Uncertain Crusade: Jimmy Carter and the Dilemmas of Human Rights Policy* (Lanham, MD, 1986), p. 7.

54. *Ibid.*, 8; Dumbrell, *Carter Presidency*, 117; and Robert A. Strong, *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge, 2000), p. 73.

55. Dumbrell, *Carter Presidency*, pp. 117–8; Burton Ira Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr.* (Lawrence, KS, 1993), p. 38.

56. Dumbrell, *Carter Presidency*, p. 115; Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York, 1986), p. 50.

57. Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, Madeline Albright, Leslie Dened, and William Odum, Miller Center Interview, Carter Presidency Project, Vol. XV, 18 February 1982, 49, Carter Library.

58. Strong, *Working in the World*, p. 73.

59. William Korey, *Human Rights and the Helsinki Accord: Focus on U.S. Policy* (New York, 1983), p. 31.

60. Dumbrell, *Carter Presidency*, p. 117; A. Glenn Mower, *Human Rights and American Foreign Policy: The Carter and Reagan Experiences* (New York, 1987), p. 81.

61. Smith, *Morality, Reason and Power*, p. 38; and Forsythe, "Human Rights in U.S. Foreign Policy," p. 448. When discussing United States involvement in the CSCE and support for human rights in his memoirs, Brzezinski focuses primarily on the possibilities for change in Eastern Europe. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977–1981* (New York, 1983), p. 296–7.

62. Paul J. Bailey and Ilka Bailey-Wiebecke, "All-European Co-operation: The CSCE's Basket Two and the ECE," *International Journal*, 32 (1977), p. 394.

63. Muravchik, *Uncertain Crusade*, p. 7; Strong, *Working in the World*, p. 73; Alexander M. Haig, Jr. with Charles McCarry, *Inner Circles: How America Changed the World: A Memoir* (New York, 1992), p. 531.

64. Drew, "Reporter at Large," p. 41; Marshall Shulman, speaking as part of *The Collapse of Détente: From the March 1977 Moscow Meetings to the December 1979 Invasion of Afghanistan: The "Launch" of The Carter-Brezhnev Project (A Conference of U.S. and Russian Policymakers Held at the "Playhouse" on the Rockefeller Estate, Pocantico Hills, New York 22–24 October 1992)*, on file at the National Security Archive, Washington, DC.

65. Vaughan, "Zbigniew Brzezinski and the Helsinki Final Act," pp. 14–15; Brzezinski to Vance, 6 October 1976, Folder 7, Box 8, Vance Papers. Basket One outlined ten principles to guide East–West relations and incorporated confidence building measures such as advanced notification of troop maneuvers, prior notification of military movements, as well as provisions for the exchange of observers and disarmament.

66. Witcover, *Marathon*, p. 594; Isaacson, *Kissinger*, pp. 663–64; Kilberg to Buchen, 28 September 1976, Helsinki, Box 19, Philip Buchen Files, GRFL; Clift to Scowcroft, 29 September 1976, IT 104 CSCE 6/1/76–1/20/77, Box 14, White House Central Files, *ibid*.

67. Lissy to Kilberg and Davis, 12 October 1976, CSCE, 1976 (6) WH, Box 45, National Security Council Europe, Canada, and Ocean Affairs Staff: Files, National Security Adviser, GRFL.

68. McFarlane to Gergen, 1 October 1976, Debate Working Papers–Second Debate, 10/6/76 Issues–Europe–Latin America, Box 27, Michael Raoul-Duval Papers, GRFL.

69. Ron Nessen, *It Sure Looks Different From the Inside* (Chicago, 1978), pp. 268–69.

70. Ford, *Time to Heal*, p. 420.

71. *Ibid*, p. 422; and Witcover, *Marathon*, p. 597.

72. Frankel later recognised that the structure of Ford's answer was strikingly similar to one that Kissinger had used defending the Helsinki Final Act months earlier. Frankel suggested that Ford had lifted his answer from briefing materials by Kissinger but had failed to formulate it accurately. Witcover, *Marathon*, pp. 598–9. Journalist Thomas M. DeFrank has explored an alternative explanation. In his book of off-the-record conversations with Ford, he writes that some of Ford's closest advisors believed that Carter's accusations that Kissinger, not Ford, was running the country had angered Ford so much that his concentration was diminished by the time he answered the question on détente. Thomas F. DeFrank, *Write It When I'm Gone: Remarkable Off-the-Record Conversations with Gerald R. Ford* (New York, 2007), p. 143.

73. Nessen, *Different From the Inside*, pp. 268–69; Ford, *Time to Heal*, pp. 422–23.

74. Nessen, *Different from the Inside*, p. 269. Witcover, however, cites campaign staff member Stu Spencer saying Scowcroft “went white,” implying that Spencer, at least, realised there was a problem with Ford's answer. Witcover, *Marathon*, p. 598.

75. Ribuffo, “Soviet Satellite?” p. 400.

76. Michael Raoul-Duval, “The 1976 Election,” in Firestone and Ugrinsky, *Post-Watergate America*, pp. 605–06.

77. Ribuffo, “Soviet Satellite?” pp. 400–01.

78. Daniel C. Thomas, “Boomerangs and Superpowers: International Norms, Transnational Networks and US Foreign Policy,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 15, 1(2002), p. 33.

79. David O. Sears and Steven H. Chaffee, “Uses and Effects of the 1976 Debates: An Overview of Empirical Studies,” in Sidney Kraus, ed., *The Great Debates: Carter vs. Ford, 1976* (Bloomington, 1979), p. 233.

80. Lev E. Dobriansky, “The Unforgettable Ford Gaffe,” *Ukrainian Quarterly*, 33, 49 (1977), p. 367; Ribuffo, “Soviet Satellite?” p. 386; Witcover, *Marathon*, p. 606.

81. Dobriansky, “Ford Gaffe,” pp. 367, 368; Schulzinger, “The Decline of Détente,” p. 417. Bob Teeter, Ford's pollster, identified the loss of momentum and time as more damaging to Ford than any specific dips in electoral support; and other aides have agreed with his analysis. Witcover, *Marathon*, p. 606; DeFrank, *Write It When I'm Gone*, 55; Ribuffo, “Soviet Satellite?”, p. 403.

82. Richard Reeves, *A Ford, not a Lincoln* (New York, 1975), p. 25.

83. Dobriansky, “Ford Gaffe,” p. 371.

84. Michael Raoul-Duval, “1976 Election,” pp. 605–06.

85. Nessen, *Different From the Inside*, p. 272.

86. Witcover, *Marathon*, pp. 599–601.

87. He went on to say: “I admire the courage of the Polish people and have always supported the hopes of Polish–Americans for freedom for their ancestral homeland. It is our policy to use every peaceful means to assist countries in Eastern Europe in their efforts to become less dependence on the Soviet Union and to establish closer ties with the West. I am very much aware of the present plight of the Eastern European nations.” Gerald R. Ford, *Public Papers of the President 1976–7*, Volume III (Washington, 1979), p. 2444. Nessen noted that Ford's comments did not placate the press who were waiting for a “public confession of error.” Nessen, *Different From the Inside*, pp. 272–73.

88. Nessen, *Different From the Inside*, p. 273. One study of members of ethnic groups in Cleveland, Ohio revealed nearly 80 percent of those surveyed had heard Ford's comment before Election Day but found little evidence Ford's comment influenced their voting. Leo W. Jeffres and K. Kyoon Hur, “Impact of Ethnic Issues on Ethnic Voters,” in Kraus, *Great Debates*, p. 441.

89. Ribuffo, “Soviet Satellite?” p. 386.

90. Witcover, *Marathon*, p. 603.

91. "USSR/Foreign Policy," 21 October 1976, Carter Quotes – USSR, Box H34, President Ford Committee, GRFL.
92. Ford, *Public Papers . . . 1976–7*, III, 2457; Nessen, *Different From the Inside*, p. 274.
93. Nessen, *Different From the Inside*, p. 276; Ford, *Public Papers . . . 1976–7*, III, p. 2464–5.
94. Witcover, *Marathon*, p. 604.
95. "Transcript of Debate Between the Vice-Presidential Candidates," *New York Times*, 16 October 1976, p. 8.
96. Pienkos, *For Your Freedom*, pp. 169–71; and Ribuffo, "Soviet Satellite?" pp. 388–89.
97. Witcover, *Marathon*, p. 603.
98. *Ibid.*, p. 606.
99. Ribuffo, "Soviet Satellite?" p. 400.
100. Baroody to Ford, CO 1-4 Communist Bloc 4/1/76–1/20/77, Box 5, White House Central Files, GRFL.
101. Hyland, *Mortal Rivals*, p. 179.
102. Memorandum, Kuropas and Baroody to Ford, 12 October 1976, CO 1 Baltic 10/1/76–1/20/77, Box 3, White House Central Files, GRFL; Nessen, *Different From the Inside*, p. 276; Ford, *Public Papers . . . 1976–7, Volume III*, p. 2485; Scowcroft to Baroody, 13 October 1976, CO 1 Baltic 10/1/76–1/20/77, Box 3, White House Central Files, GRFL; Kuropas to Duval, 20 October 1976, Debate Input-Baroody, William and Staff, Box 26, Michael Raoul-Duval Files, GRFL.
103. Ribuffo, "Soviet Satellite?," p. 403; Dobriansky, "Ford Gaffe," p. 368; Witcover, *Marathon*, p. 606.
104. Carter was elected the thirty-ninth President of the United States on 2 November 1976 with 297 electoral votes and 50.1 percent of the popular vote.
105. White House resistance to the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which monitored the implementation of the Helsinki Final Act, led it to miss an opportunity to blunt criticism of his CSCE policy.
106. Ford made these comments in 1991 and 1989 respectively. DeFrank, *Write It When I'm Gone*, 89–90; Ribuffo, "Soviet Satellite?" p. 402. His views are supported by a growing body of literature suggesting the Helsinki Final Act contributed to the end of the Cold War by spurring the development of a transnational network of activists pushing for reform in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. See, for example, Daniel C. Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton, 2001); Snyder, *Helsinki Process*; Richard Falk, "The Infancy of Global Civil Society," in Geir Lundestad and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *Beyond the Cold War: New Dimensions in International Relations* (New York, 1993); Daniel C. Thomas, "Human Rights Ideas, the Demise of Communism, and the End of the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 7, 2 (Spring 2005), pp. 110–41; Ernst Krux, "Revolution in Eastern Europe—Revolution in the West?" *Problems of Communism*, 40 (May–June 1991), p. 6; Daniel C. Thomas, "The Helsinki Accords and Political Change in Eastern Europe," in Thomas Risse et al. eds. *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change* (New York, 1999), pp. 205–33; Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents* (New York, 1995), p. 346.