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Diplomacy, Dissidents, and Democracy:
The Cold War, Human Rights, and the
Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe,
1968-1989

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Introduction:

Words on Paper

In August of 1975 the leaders of 35 states gathered in Helsinki, Finland to sign the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). They had little idea what consequences the words on the paper could bring, and many of them probably would not have signed if they had known. The agreement and the review process it established contained new opportunities to transcend boundaries and advocate for changes in governance. The Final Act, which formally acknowledged the borders and regimes of Eastern Europe, spelled out principles upon which European governance would be based including peaceful relations among states, as well as respect for human rights and openness in human contact and information transfer. The CSCE, thanks to the efforts of dissidents and diplomats, would become a primary means through which human rights values would shape the Cold War confrontation and the eventual reconciliation between the Soviet Union and the West.

The Helsinki Final Act was a lengthy agreement establishing norms of international relations in Europe. It was signed on August 1, 1975 by thirty-three European countries, including the entire Warsaw Pact, and by the United States and Canada. The final version of the Act contained five sections. The three major sections were “Questions Relating to Security in Europe;” “Co-operation in the Field of Economics, of Science and Technology and of the Environment;” and

“Co-operation in Humanitarian and Other Fields.” They were respectively referred to as Basket I, Basket II, and Basket III during the negotiation and drafting process. Basket I included a set of ten principles that would govern relations between states. The Final Act also contained a brief section entitled Questions Relating to Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean, and a section regarding the Follow-up to the Conference.¹

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe saw years of debating, revising, and compromising by the Soviet bloc and the West before the Final Act was signed in Helsinki on August 1, 1975. While the CSCE process included a lot of tedious diplomatic wrangling that could seem at first glance to be of doubtful value, the diplomatic contest established a shift in the Cold War rivalry with far-reaching consequences. Initially, Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev led the effort to take the diplomatic initiative for Soviet socialism by promoting a congress of European states. Their ideological challenge was met primarily by West European delegations who insisted that humanitarian issues were relevant to security and cooperation. By signing the Final Act, the Soviet bloc formally accepted that human rights and the free movement of people and information were to be among the foundations of European order, and the Western signatories, including all NATO countries, officially recognized the borders of Soviet-dominated regimes of Eastern Europe. The Soviet delegates understood that the human rights principles were directed against their system of

¹ “Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe: Final Act,” August 1, 1975. Reproduced from an official text provided by the US Department of State in *International Legal Materials*, Vol. 14, No. 5, September 1975, American Society of International Law, 1292-1325.

rule, but begrudgingly accepted them in order to achieve the important symbolic victory of official recognition for Second World War conquests, to strengthen the Communist position in the diplomatic struggle over divided Germany, and to enhance their international prestige, which had suffered from the crushing of Czechoslovak reform and the rise of dissidents.

After 1975, transnational activists and Western governments used the Final Act and the CSCE Follow-Up Conferences to challenge the Soviet Union's human rights practices. Soon after the signing of the act a grassroots struggle to implement Helsinki human rights norms was taken up by an emerging dissident movement in the Soviet Union. While the Soviet government soon suppressed Helsinki activists in the USSR, the activists were still able to influence opinion about the country and would emerge in the less repressive Gorbachev era with a platform for change. The United States led vigorous challenges to the Eastern bloc in the CSCE, decrying the failures of the Soviet Union and its closest allies to live up to the Final Act's human rights agreements during follow-up conferences. While Helsinki activism also took place in some of the Soviet satellite countries, most prominently by Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union was the dominant member of the Warsaw Pact and the primary actor in negotiations with the West. Thus, a focus on the Soviet Union is warranted.

For dissidents in the Soviet bloc, Helsinki activism had the advantage of a unifying platform that Communist governments had signed their support for (the Final Act), increased international support (the transnational network and the

international spotlight of the CSCE process), and the inclusion of both powerful players with political and economic leverage as well as activists planting Helsinki principles into international norms. Dissidents recognized that the CSCE process had potential for encouraging change in the Soviet Union. Dissidents had already been using international contacts and the terminology of human rights, and the CSCE inspired further development of transnational networks and international accountability processes. Recognizing the importance the Soviet leadership placed on the CSCE, dissidents would advocate for the use of the CSCE process as leverage to encourage reform even before the signing of the Final Act, and soon afterwards used the Act as a basis for human rights principles and used the international attention of the CSCE to broadcast Soviet failures to live up to these principles.

The efforts of government and non-government actors established human rights norms as an important part of international diplomacy. The US Congressional Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe established human rights compliance within CSCE as an official concern of the US government. The Carter administration and its approach to the CSCE bolstered this commitment and established human rights as a primary topic in CSCE follow-up meetings with the help of West European delegations. A series of transnational activist groups, including Helsinki Watch in the United States, helped highlight abuses and maintain public pressure on governments. Helsinki groups operated within the Cold War environment, but as independent actors open to citizen participation they managed to assert human rights as a continuing

transnational societal concern and not merely a political weapon of East-West confrontation.

The Final Act's concept of human rights became a major component in the ideological aspect of the East-West confrontation and eventual reconciliation. Perceptions of human rights and violations of human rights were colored by ideology, whether Soviet or Western. Soviet leaders viewed their country as guaranteeing important rights including work and housing, and maintained that troublemakers and Western imperialists only used "so-called 'human rights'" as a cover for dangerous subversive activity. Western leaders saw the human rights abuses of the Soviet Union and its allies as proof that Communists disregarded freedom, and tended to overlook abuses by Western allies or non-aligned states in the CSCE. When the Soviet Union's human rights policies began to conform more to the standards set in the CSCE, upholding human rights became a more cooperative than confrontational endeavor. Trust between the USSR and the West then increased as ideological conflict decreased.

The CSCE played a major role in working out the principles upon which a united Europe would rest. The principles served as conditions which the Eastern Bloc would need to strive for in order to be truly integrated into Europe. Fulfillment of the agreement also served to measure the trustworthiness of the Soviet Union. While the CSCE process and the Helsinki Final Act did not launch Soviet dissent nor serve as the sole source of pressure on the Soviet Union for human rights improvement, it was one of the most influential diplomatic

processes owing to the importance that Soviet leaders, Western governments, and Soviet dissidents placed on it.

The influence of the CSCE on the Soviet Union is best assessed with an understanding of literature in both Cold War history and Soviet history genres. This essay attempts to integrate diplomatic history with Soviet political history to understand Soviet policy regarding the CSCE and human rights from the launch of the Conference to the new political situation at the end of 1989. It contributes to understanding how the CSCE process fit into the Cold War and Soviet politics, but does not attempt to list all pressures and influences on the Soviet Union or compare their relative weight. It is clear, however, that the effect of the CSCE must be taken into account to gain a full picture of the end of the Cold War and Soviet reforms of the late 1980s. Although it is difficult to assess the influence of numerous factors on Soviet decision-making, Soviet documents, diplomatic correspondence, and memoirs shed light on the concerns and values of the Soviet leadership.

When histories of the Cold War discuss the Final Act, it tends to be examined within the broader context of détente and human rights. Vladislav M. Zubok, in his book *A Failed Empire*, discusses the Final Act in the context of superpower confrontation and Soviet leaders being cautious not to disrupt détente with embarrassing cases of repression. Zubok stresses that Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev wanted to be remembered as a peacemaker. The

Soviets agreed to the Third Basket in exchange for Western acceptance of the territorial and political status quo. Although the Final Act initially outraged ideological conservatives in the Politburo, they were calmed by Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko's insistence that the Soviets got what they wanted and that as far as human rights were concerned, "we remain the masters in our own house." While Zubok writes that "the commitments to human rights embedded in the act proved to be a time bomb under the Soviet regime," his later chapters give do not discuss the CSCE, and focus instead on the initiative of Mikhail Gorbachev and his enlightened aides, the growing appeal of the West, and the Gorbachev-Reagan relationship. Imperial overreach, economic trouble, and the Chernobyl disaster serve as additional motivations for reform. However, human rights, along with withdrawal from Afghanistan, remained important criteria for Reagan's assessment of Soviet intentions.²

Melvyn P. Leffler also presents Brezhnev as an aspiring peacemaker. With World War II shaping his life experience, Brezhnev "wanted peace and stability in Europe," which required the formal recognition of East Germany and the acceptance of the Oder-Neisse border between East Germany and Poland. Brezhnev accepted the tradeoff of human rights in return for the recognition of the territorial status quo. Particularly with the promises of Nixon and Kissinger to not interfere in the internal affairs of other nations, Brezhnev believed the West had

² Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War From Stalin to Gorbachev* (North Carolina, 2009), 231, 237-238.

been rebuffed and the Final Act's human rights commitments did not seriously threaten Communist rule.³

Major works discussing the CSCE and human rights include books by Sarah Snyder, Daniel Thomas, and Alexis Heraclides, as well as an essay by Svetlana Savranskaya. In *The Helsinki Effect*, Thomas chronicles the development of human rights norms in international diplomacy and how this affected activism in the Soviet bloc. Believing that the norms established by the CSCE would ultimately have little effect, Soviet leaders agreed to their inclusion in return for recognition of post-war borders. The CSCE established a process of “transnational socialization” through domestic and international demands for compliance with human rights norms, which set in motion revolutionary changes resulting in the end of communist rule in 1989-1990.⁴ While Thomas is careful to note that Helsinki and human rights activism is not a mono-causal explanation for transitions in the Soviet bloc, his reliance on discussions with Helsinki activists and his presentation of dissidence prior to 1975 suggests that he might be overemphasizing the Helsinki effect. In *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War*, Sarah B. Snyder effectively shows how advocacy by transnational activists and their communication with activists in the Soviet bloc put Helsinki principles into effect. However, her focus on the human rights issue does not give a clear picture of where human rights fit into the Cold War confrontation and her

³ Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, The Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York, 2007), 241, 249.

⁴ Daniel C. Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism*. (Princeton, 2001), 35, 61, 284-287.

emphasis on human rights without enough contextual caveats or examination of Soviet internal politics implies an overly-prominent place for the Helsinki process in the Cold War.⁵ *Security and Cooperation in Europe: The Human Dimension*, by Alexis Heraclides, contributes thorough detail on humanitarian issues within the diplomatic process of the CSCE. Another valuable source is Svetlana Savranskaya's essay "Human Rights Movement in the USSR After the Signing of the Helsinki Final Act, and the Reaction of Soviet Authorities." While Savranskaya's essay is short, it provides helpful details on how Soviet dissidents were affected by the Final Act and how the KGB reacted. In addition, articles by Angela Romano and Michael Cotey Morgan describe how the Soviets aimed at seeking greater international legitimacy and increasing stability in Europe.⁶

Valuable works in the field of Soviet history that discuss Soviet reform include *Armageddon Averted* by Stephen Kotkin and *The Gorbachev Factor* by Archie Brown. Kotkin focuses mostly on Soviet economic and structural problems and Gorbachev's belief in a better Communism. However, he does include the CSCE among the Western pressures on the Soviet Union. The Final Act "led to an international legal and moral 'full court press' that Soviet diplomats and negotiators felt alongside Western military, economic, and political

⁵ Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge, 2011).

⁶ Angela Romano, "The Main Task of the European Political Cooperation: Fostering Détente in Europe" in Poul Villaume and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *Perforating the Iron Curtain: European Détente, Transatlantic Relations, and the Cold War, 1965-1985* (Copenhagen, 2010); Michael Cotey Morgan, "The United States and the Making of the Helsinki Final Act," in Frederick Longevall and Andrew Preston, eds., *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*, (Oxford, 2008), 164-182.

might.”⁷ *The Gorbachev Factor* focuses on Gorbachev’s critical influence, and discusses his background, beliefs, appointments, and shifts in policy. While it does not discuss the CSCE, it does highlight Gorbachev’s affinity for the West.⁸

The CSCE process, which included the work of activists in the Soviet bloc and their advocates in the West, was one important factor driving reform in the Soviet Union and the dissolution of Cold War divisions in Europe. It started as a Soviet diplomatic initiative to assert the leadership of Soviet socialism. Soon West Europeans fought to include humanitarian standards in the principles of European order. Then Soviet dissidents would convince the West to take up the human rights struggle, which was most vigorously pursued by the United States. Finally, the Soviet Union adopted Helsinki human rights principles, helping to dissolve Cold War tensions while driving the country toward democracy.

⁷ Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse 1970-2000*, (Oxford, 2001), 24.

⁸ Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, (New York, 1997).

Chapter 1:

Brezhnev and Europe, 1968-1975

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe originated in Soviet efforts to advance their interests while avoiding a major war. Through the drafting of the principles upon which stability in Europe was to lie, the CSCE became a forum to contest the meaning of European order. Despite misgivings, Soviet officials approved of signing the Final Act with the human rights principles that West Europeans insisted on including. They went ahead with the Final Act primarily because they believed it would boost their international prestige, which Brezhnev tied to his personal image as a statesman. An official World War II settlement was a huge political success when Soviet identity was tied firmly to the victory against fascism. Fears of West German revanchist politics contributed to the Soviets' sense of urgency. The CSCE was part of sincere efforts to normalize relations with the West, but Soviet leaders wanted to have peace on their terms and establish better conditions for expanding Soviet ideological hegemony. The Soviet ideological offensive involved recovering prestige they had lost by crushing reform in Czechoslovakia and recovering the regime's attraction after the emergence of dissidents. Their ideological challenge was met by the West, primarily West Europeans. The Final Act was the result of intense diplomatic struggle. Its effects on Soviet politics and the Cold War were rooted in the struggles surrounding its creation.

Participants in the CSCE process, as well as historians, have recognized that the Soviets reluctantly accepted the human rights principles and the requirements for open communication and travel in return for recognition of their dominance in Eastern Europe. In a 1974 memorandum, a US official recognized that the European delegates were “reluctant to consider further compromise” until the Soviets continued negotiations on matters of “human contacts.” The Soviet delegation was less than enthusiastic.⁹ Eventually the Soviets would agree to the inclusion of the Basket III principles regarding free movement of people and access to information. They would also assent to “Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief” being recognized as one of the ten principles guiding relations among states listed in Basket I.

While some of the questions that need to be addressed in answering why the Soviet Union accepted human rights principles in the CSCE are discussed in the historiography, questions remain about why the Soviets put so much importance on official Western recognition of the postwar status quo. The historiography shows that the Soviets viewed the human rights principles as a threat that they could deal with. However, it is less clear why the Soviet leadership attached so much importance to the recognition of its gains in Eastern Europe. By the early 1970s the West was not seriously challenging the status quo that had existed in Eastern Europe for over two decades. Soviet hegemony was

⁹ Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (Hartman) to Secretary of State Kissinger, June 30, 1974, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1969-1976, Vol. 39, Doc 227.

confirmed as recently as their 1968 military invasion of Czechoslovakia to ensure the monopoly of Communist Party rule. In addition, bilateral agreements were being made at the time between Western and Eastern bloc countries. The Soviet approach to the CSCE was based on how they viewed their gains and losses, how they understood the territorial recognition gained in the Final Act and how they assessed the degree to which Western proposals threatened their rule.

To Soviet officials, official recognition for their World War II gains was an important victory. It meant international recognition for the immense sacrifice and glorious victory against fascism by the forces of liberation led by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. As Brezhnev remarked in a speech commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the victory against Germany, “in the course of the 20th century, our country has twice stood at the source of major changes in the face of the world,” the first being the October Revolution that installed Bolshevik rule, and the second being “the rout of fascism, in which the Soviet Union played the decisive role.”¹⁰ In a 1972 speech commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the USSR, Brezhnev plainly connected the war to the European security conference. He proclaimed that the Soviet people remembered the two world wars “burst into their homes from the West, from Europe.” They would remember 1941 and the twenty million Soviet people killed

¹⁰ Leonid Brezhnev, “A Great Exploit of the Soviet People,” May 8, 1975, *Following Lenin's Course: Speeches and Articles* (Moscow, 1975), 551.

during the war “as we complete the historic work of guaranteeing the immutability of the postwar European settlement.”¹¹

The importance of the war was not limited to the statements of politicians. Stephen Kotkin writes that Victory Day, commemorating the end of the war, “was a powerful collective ritual, involving family trips to the cemetery, whose meaning was shared by almost the entire country.” It also “underscored the attainment of superpower status.”¹² Eduard Shevardnadze, who would eventually become Foreign Minister under Gorbachev, remarked that “The war shaped me as it did millions of my contemporaries. It formed my convictions and purpose in life.”¹³ World War II remained a powerful rallying banner for the Soviet Union in the 1970s. The importance of the war experience to the Soviets was understood at the time by Western political leaders. In a December 1974 conversation between French and American officials, Henry Kissinger noted that Brezhnev wanted the final conference to be held “before the anniversary of the Second World War,” which did not happen because the Western allies delayed the conference. French President Valéry Giscard d’Estang acknowledged that “They think this is the final price of the war, and that is why they want it before May. It is for [Brezhnev] the last price of détente also.”¹⁴

¹¹ Brezhnev, “The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,” December 21, 1972, *Following Lenin’s Course*, 89.

¹² Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, 45.

¹³ Shevardnadze was born in 1928. Eduard Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom* (New York, 1991), 13.

¹⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, December 15, 1974, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. 39, Doc 267.

Brezhnev's personal ambitions influenced the CSCE process. The Conference would be his crowning achievement as a great Soviet statesman and peacemaker. By gaining ratification of the World War II settlement, Brezhnev showed that he could do what Stalin and Khrushchev had failed to accomplish.¹⁵ The signing of the Final Act was initially seen by Brezhnev as the consummation of decades of Soviet diplomacy and the peak of Soviet international influence.¹⁶ Daniel Thomas notes that as negotiations dragged on, Brezhnev became "increasingly anxious to claim victory in the CSCE in time for the Twenty-fifth Communist Party Congress," scheduled for February 1976, where he would proclaim the successes of his leadership to Communist Party officials.¹⁷ The Helsinki Final Act would provide official recognition of Soviet gains in the Second World War. Brezhnev had attained a grand agreement of peace which, importantly, he viewed as being settled on Soviet terms.

It was only after a hard political struggle that Brezhnev reached the top position in the USSR, which enabled him to institute his détente program, and he hoped that his achievements in foreign affairs would provide a substantial portion of the clout he needed to stay on top. Vladislav Zubok characterizes Brezhnev as "a centrist politician and an enemy of radical political moves in any direction." When Nikita Khrushchev was ousted in 1964, Brezhnev was only one member of

¹⁵ Carole Fink, "Facing Leonid Brezhnev and Each Other During the High Era of Détente: Nixon, Brandt, and Meir, 1969-1974." (lecture, Columbia Seminar on Twentieth-Century Politics and Society, New York, November 16, 2011).

¹⁶ Svetlana Savranskaya, "Human Rights Movement in the USSR After the Signing of the Helsinki Final Act, and the Reaction of Soviet Authorities," in Leopoldo Nuti, ed, *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: From Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985* (New York, 2009), 37.

¹⁷ Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 81.

the cabal that succeeded him, and by no means the most prominent. Alexei Kosygin appeared to be the top statesman and took a leading role in foreign affairs. However, Brezhnev, despite his limited education and earlier lack of ability to inspire confidence as a leader, began to rise. From 1967 to 1968 he consolidated his party constituency and removed many rivals from positions of authority. Brezhnev understood that he could not compete with Kosygin in the area of domestic economy, but would be able to outshine Kosygin in foreign affairs. Although Brezhnev's military reforms oversaw drastic increases in nuclear armaments, in foreign policy he came to rely not on dogmatic conservatives but on a few policy experts, particularly Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. Gromyko admired Stalin's diplomacy during the Grand Alliance years and tried to avoid the overuse of ideology in foreign affairs. His primary goal was to obtain Western recognition of the new borders of the USSR and Soviet satellites in Central Europe.¹⁸ Détente was a personal project of Brezhnev and his advisors, who needed to defend their policies and their positions from hard-line rivals.

Brezhnev's response to Czechoslovakia's 1968 reforms was his first major test of leadership, and it would have profound effects on the USSR's international position and legitimacy. His order to send Warsaw Pact forces to Czechoslovakia in August 1968 confirmed the monopoly of Communist Party power within the

¹⁸ Major territorial changes included the annexation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, which became Soviet republics, the shifting of Poland's borders westward into pre-war Germany, and the shifting of the Soviet border westward into the former territories of several states. The USSR also saw itself as defending the sovereign German Democratic Republic (East Germany) from Western revanchists and Nazi sympathizers. Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 194-195, 201, 204-206.

Soviet sphere of interest, but also undermined international perceptions of Soviet legitimacy. A Communist government had been established in Czechoslovakia in the immediate postwar period and the country was a member of the Warsaw Pact. In early 1968, the country's Communist leadership under Alexander Dubcek began a set of reforms that came to be known as the Prague Spring. They relaxed restrictions on cultural expression and on the freedom of association, and the government even took steps to end the political monopoly of the Communist Party.¹⁹

Dubcek's reforms shook up the entire Warsaw Pact. Brezhnev, who had supported the appointment of Dubcek, was personally at risk of losing his power. For example, the Ukrainian first secretary blamed the Prague Spring on Brezhnev's "rotten liberalism" while the leaders of Poland and East Germany pushed for military intervention in Czechoslovakia and openly criticized Brezhnev as too emotional, naïve, and non-committal. Supporters and opponents of intervention shouted at each other in the party headquarters in Moscow. Brezhnev agonized over how to respond. He started taking tranquilizers, a habit that he would never overcome. After KGB chair Yuri Andropov falsely depicted the Czechs as preparing for an armed uprising and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko gave assurance that the West would not intervene, Brezhnev approved the invasion.²⁰ On August 20, in the largest Soviet military movement since World War II, Soviet troops, along with tens of thousands of troops from Poland,

¹⁹ Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 34.

²⁰ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 207-208; Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 239.

Hungary, East Germany, and Bulgaria, entered Czechoslovakia. Soldiers seized key buildings and Soviet authorities removed reformers from power as tanks entered the streets to assert control. Initially Dubcek was pressured to lead an anti-reformist government, but he would be forced to step down in April to make room for Gustav Husak, a Slovak party leader the Soviets had come to look favorably upon as a reliable hardliner. By mid-1970 the Husak government expelled Dubcek from the Party and instituted a series of purges instituted.²¹

The suppression of the Prague Spring dealt a severe blow to the appeal of Soviet socialism, which had crushed “socialism with a human face.” Many members of Communist parties in the West began to turn away from the Soviet Union, and the Communist parties of Italy and Spain openly condemned the Soviet invasion.²² China denounced the invasion and reinforced its troops at the Soviet border. Albania severed its last ties with the USSR. Even Romania, a Warsaw Pact member, ridiculed the invasion.²³ Within the Soviet Union there was also cause for concern. The KGB warned that the majority of undergraduates at Soviet universities were impressed by the Czech students. “What has attracted especially great interest is the creation of opposition parties. The very word ‘opposition’ is something students find appealing,” concluded KGB director Yuri Andropov.²⁴ Dissident and physicist Yuri Orlov recalled that in 1968 he “did not

²¹ Vladimir V. Kusin, *From Dubcek to Charter 77: A Study of ‘Normalization’ in Czechoslovakia, 1968-1978*, (New York, 1978), 9, 13, 28, 69, 73-75.

²² Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington DC, 1994), 544.

²³ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 240.

²⁴ Andropov on Surveillance of Soviet Youth, November 1968, Hanhimäki and Westad eds, *The Cold War: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts*. (Oxford, 2004), 474.

encounter a single individual among my enormous number of acquaintances who was not excited” by the Czech’s idea of transforming Soviet-style socialism into socialism with a human face. However, in Russia “ordinary people cursed the ungrateful Czechs for forgetting that the Soviet army had saved them from the Nazis.”²⁵

Although Soviet leaders worried less about intellectual currents within in the USSR as they did about those in Czechoslovakia, the late 1960s also saw an increase in dissent in the USSR. The dissident movement that emerged in the mid 1960s became prominent in 1968 when the samizdat journal *Chronicle of Current Events* appeared, the first issue of which featured the UN Declaration of Human Rights.²⁶ In the same year, Andrei Sakharov, who had received the Hero of Socialist Labor award for his leading work on the hydrogen bomb, first came into serious conflict with the regime after the underground publishing of his essay “Reflections on Progress, Peaceful Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom,” which was subsequently reprinted worldwide.²⁷ In addition, rising Jewish and Zionist consciousness, bolstered by Israel’s decisive victory in the Six Day War of 1967, inspired a number of Soviet Jews to oppose the regime that typically regarded them as bottom-rung citizens.²⁸ Many of them would become known as “refuseniks” after the Soviet Union refused them permission to emigrate, and a

²⁵ Yuri Orlov, *Dangerous Thoughts: Memoirs of a Russian Life* (New York, 1991), 152.

²⁶ Samizdat referred to works “self-published” without legal sanction. Savranskaya, “Human Rights Movement in the USSR,” 29.

²⁷ Sakharov had earlier made private appeals to officials on behalf of dissidents and engaged in efforts to prevent ecological destruction of Lake Baikal. Sakharov, *Memoirs* (New York, 1990), 282, 288.

²⁸ Gal Beckerman, *When They Come for Us, We’ll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry* (New York, 2010), 103.

few would later become prominent members of human rights groups. Many Soviet dissidents, who saw the Prague Spring reflecting their advocacy for a more humane socialism against Brezhnev's Stalinist direction in domestic policy, cried out against the invasion of Czechoslovakia.²⁹

From Brezhnev's viewpoint in the early 1970s, taking the initiative in convening a European security conference could help the Soviets recover their prestige and following as the self-proclaimed leaders of the international working class in the climate of dissent and disillusionment of 1968. Indeed, taking a leading role in the establishment of peace and security in Europe would allow him to present Soviet power in a positive light. Moreover, bringing the Warsaw Pact regimes to a conference of European states was a way to legitimize them as socialist partners, and their participation in a conference with Western states made them appear as more legitimate members of the international community. Leaders of Warsaw Pact countries often did have their own interests in mind at the CSCE, including the desire to reduce their economic dependence on Moscow, but they generally aligned their CSCE policy with that of the Soviet Union.³⁰

Paradoxically, Brezhnev's success in Czechoslovakia allowed him more freedom to pursue his personal goals of détente because it strengthened his control of the party leadership. On March 17, 1969, the Warsaw Pact issued a renewed call for a European security conference. The Soviets had previously proposed a European security conference as early as 1954, but their 1969 pronouncement was the first

²⁹ Kusin, *From Dubcek to Charter 77*, 36.

³⁰ Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 35; Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War*, 26.

time they invited the US as a participant and did not demand the dissolution of NATO.³¹

To the Kremlin, CSCE efforts were part of a strategy for making gains in the Cold War political contest through peaceful means. It is certainly not giving Brezhnev too much credit to acknowledge that the experience of the Second World War impacted him and the thought of nuclear war horrified him, but to Brezhnev and many other Soviet leaders the efficacy of peace was tied to Soviet power. They saw themselves as pursuing an active policy of peace, with Soviet arms providing a check on Western aggression.³² Détente rested on the acknowledgement that relaxation of tensions did not mean agreement. As Shevardnadze put it, Soviet old thinking regarded “peaceful co-existence as a specific form of class warfare.”³³ Brezhnev explicitly stated this in his 1972 speech commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the USSR. He announced that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had always assumed and would continue to assume that the “class struggle” between the capitalist and socialist systems in the economic, political, and ideological domains would continue because “the world outlook and the class aims of socialism and capitalism are opposite and irreconcilable.” However, the Soviet Union would “strive to shift this historically inevitable struggle onto a path free from the perils of war, of

³¹ Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 35-36; Alexis Heraclides, *Security and Cooperation in Europe: The Human Dimension, 1972-1992* (London, 1993), 3.

³² Brezhnev, “The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,” 74, 78.

³³ Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, 52.

dangerous conflicts, and an uncontrolled arms race.”³⁴ Soviet leaders sought to advance their international position in ways they believed would be unlikely to cause war between the superpowers. To this end, they hoped the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe would establish a framework for the advancement of socialism by peaceful means, and would itself be a forum for diplomatic struggle between East and West.

Though the advancement of the Communist position was one purpose for the CSCE, the Soviets saw Western recognition of the legitimacy of Communist governments as a crucial step in normalizing relations between East and West. Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin discussed concerns over the Nixon administration’s view of Eastern borders and frontiers with Kissinger in early 1970. Kissinger assured Dobrynin that President Nixon viewed existing borders as “immutable” but would not publically state this position regarding the German division.³⁵ While earlier European security conference proposals by the Communist bloc had sought to isolate the United States by keeping them out of the conference, by the 1970s the Soviets actively pressed the United States to get involved. Unlike political leaders in Western Europe, Nixon and Kissinger were not interested in the conference that they saw little to gain from, and they did little to bring it to fruition. After repeated pleas from the Soviet government, Kissinger began taking a more active role, but continued to deride the conference. In a 1974 discussion with diplomats from the Netherlands, he

³⁴ Brezhnev, “The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,” 94-95.

³⁵ Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), Washington, February 18, 1970, *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972* (Government Printing Office, 2007), 131-132.

declared that “We don’t care about CSCE. We were against the conference in the first place.” He only cared that the conference did “not do any damage.”³⁶ To the Soviets, the CSCE would play a major role in the normalization of foreign relations and the relaxation of tensions between them and the Western capitalist countries.

While the Eastern bloc did have economic motivations for pursuing and agreeing to the Final Act, economic motivations appear to be less important than political concerns. Economic benefits should not be considered a tradeoff because the Western Europeans also desired more economic exchange, and economic planks were not subject to major disputes in the CSCE negotiations. Dobrynin wrote that by the time of the twenty-fourth party congress in 1971 the party establishment, facing a stagnant economy, the emergence of dissidents, and the growth of discontent among the educated classes, began to “realize the need to satisfy the population’s basic requirements more fully and to narrow the gap with the West.” Soviet officials would not pursue political or economic liberalization, but “the realities of the rest of the world and the strains on our economy prompted the Soviet leadership to improve relations with the nations of Europe and the United States.”³⁷ They hoped that normalization of relations would benefit the Communist countries by facilitating economic exchanges. However, the CSCE did not establish a particular trade regime and trade agreements would differ

³⁶ Some State Department officials took more interest in the CSCE than Kissinger. Assistant Secretary for European Affairs Hartman points out during the meeting that he was actively involved in the CSCE negotiation and drafting process. Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, August 1, 1974, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. 39, Doc 241.

³⁷ Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to America’s Six Cold War Presidents, 1962-1986* (New York, 1995), 217-218.

among the signatories. Trade arrangements between the Soviet Union and the United States were restricted by the United States passage of the Jackson-Vanik amendment, attached to a December 1974 trade bill, which made improved trade relations with the Soviet Union contingent on the Kremlin's Jewish emigration policy.³⁸ However, trade agreements were not subject to major disputes in the CSCE. Western European governments tended to look favorably upon improved trade relations with the East and viewed wider economic exchange as one of their goals for the Conference.³⁹ The Soviets could have improved trade relations in agreements without the CSCE, but the CSCE streamlined the process. Trade relations with the United States continued to suffer, but trade with Western Europe grew, as a result of politics within the Western countries.

As much as they worried about American intentions, the Communist bloc leaders also worried about West German territorial ambitions and hoped to diplomatically block them. Throughout the 1960s, the Soviet and East German governments decried "revanchism" among the West Germans.⁴⁰ These worries were not entirely without basis. Chancellor Willy Brandt recalled that when he met with East German representative Willi Stoph in 1970, "several thousand Nazis – and others who acted like Nazis – had assembled in a protest demonstration," some bearing signs calling for the execution of Brandt. The crowds attacked the car that the two men were travelling in and youths took down

³⁸ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 231-234, 245.

³⁹ Romano, "The Main Task of the European Political Cooperation," 125.

⁴⁰ For example: "[Kosygin] said there were dangerous forces at work and mentioned West German revanchism... The multilateral nuclear force in Europe was aimed at Soviet Union and US was thereby protecting German revanchism." Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, July 15, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. 14, Doc. 118.

the East German flag at the hotel where the proceedings were held. These events were undoubtedly reported to East Berlin and Moscow.⁴¹

The Soviet leaders' concern with West Germany and their view of the CSCE's effects on the diplomatic contest is shown by actions they took shortly after Helsinki. On October 7, 1975, the Soviets signed the Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Cooperation Between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the German Democratic Republic. The treaty's preamble contained a passage reaffirming the "internationalist duty of the socialist countries" to uphold, consolidate and defend "socialist gains," along with promises to strengthen peace and security in Europe based on mutually beneficial cooperation between states with different social systems. Article eight of the treaty promised that if one of the parties was subject to armed attack "the other High Contracting Party will regard this as an attack upon itself and will immediately render it every assistance." In effect, a renewed military alliance was signed by East Germany and the Soviet Union little more than two months after the concluding peace settlement of the Second World War, a settlement that was supposed to officially mark the establishment of peaceful cooperation as the basis of diplomacy in Europe.⁴² While the Treaty of Friendship does serve to clarify the basis of relations between East Germany and the Soviet Union, it makes sense to

⁴¹ Willy Brandt, *My Life in Politics*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York, 1992), 210-213. The meeting took place on May 21, 1970 in Kassel. Brandt, who had resisted the Nazi regime, now led the Social Democratic Party of Germany. Willi Stoph was Chairman of the German Democratic Republic Council of Ministers.

⁴² Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Cooperation Between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the German Democratic Republic, October 7, 1975, *Documents on Germany, 1944-1985*, 1297-1300.

view it as the next step in Communist diplomatic maneuvering in the waging of international “class struggle” by peaceful means, and partly as a response to the threat of renewed outside influence.

Articles six and seven of the Treaty of Friendship make it clear that the Treaty is aimed at West Germany. Article six begins by proclaiming that “The High Contracting Parties regard the inviolability of the frontiers in Europe as the paramount requirement for safeguarding European security.” The frontiers between the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany are mentioned specifically, and the parties promise to “exert joint efforts to counter any manifestations of revanchism or militarism and will work for strict compliance with the treaties concluded to strengthen European security.” Article seven reaffirmed that ties with West Berlin would be based on “the fact that it is not a constituent part of the Federal Republic of Germany and will continue not to be governed by it.”⁴³ Essentially, the treaty used the language and principles of Basket I to attempt to contain West Germany and imply that West Berlin fell within the inviolable borders of East Germany. This was consistent with the strategy discussed in a 1970 policy analysis by the GDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which considered it “an essential task” to establish judicial and political settlements that reduced the “room of maneuver for West German imperialism.”⁴⁴

The Treaty of Friendship was not only about the Soviet Union reaffirming its

⁴³ Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Cooperation Between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the German Democratic Republic, October 7, 1975, *Documents on Germany, 1944-1985*, 1297-1300.

⁴⁴ Attitudes and Measures of the Warsaw Treaty States for Convening a Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1970-1971, October 20, 1970, Cold War International History Project (cwihip.org) of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, CSCE Negotiation Process.

commitment to East Germany, but it was also an attempt to advance the Communist position by diplomatic means.

The treaty also established a renewed cohesion of the Communist bloc in the face of increased contact with the West that the Final Act promised. It underscored the importance of strengthening state ideology against outside influences. The parties would “concert their efforts to make effective use of the material and spiritual potential of their peoples and states for the purposes of building a socialist and communist society and strengthening the socialist community.” The treaty called for the promotion of “co-operation between their organs of state power and between their social organizations” and encouraged the development of contacts between the people of the two countries.⁴⁵ These clauses should be seen as responses to the threat of increased openness, an expression of resisting the “anti-socialist effects intended by the imperialist states” through “increased coordination and cooperation” in the Eastern bloc.⁴⁶ They were part of the Communist efforts to mitigate the potential damage caused by the parts of the Final Act that were undesirable to the Communist leadership, consistent with the view that the Western initiatives in the Final Act were threats that Communist parties were capable of dealing with.

The Western reaction to the Treaty of Friendship was unsurprised and undeterred. West German Federal Minister Franke stated bluntly that “this treaty

⁴⁵ Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Cooperation Between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the German Democratic Republic, *Documents on Germany*, 1297-1300.

⁴⁶ Attitudes and Measures of the Warsaw Treaty States, CWIHP.

was to be expected and is consonant with the policies of these two states,” but that it could not change the current legal situation.⁴⁷ The governments of France, the United Kingdom, and the United States issued an official statement one week later declaring that “no treaty concluded by any of the Four Powers with a third state can in any way affect the rights and responsibilities of the Four Powers,” and therefore the rights and responsibilities of the Four Powers were unaffected by the Treaty of Friendship.⁴⁸ A December 1976 policy statement by West German Chancellor Schmidt on relations between the German states called for continued improvement in relations while insisting that their Germany policy was “free from illusions.” Schmidt declared that “Everyone knows that the aim of our policy is to work for a state of peace in Europe in which the German nation will regain its unity through free self-determination,” and acknowledged that “the GDR leadership pursues as its long-term goal the replacement, the defeat, of our political system.”⁴⁹ The Western allies would meet the Soviet diplomatic challenge, and they continued to hold onto West Berlin. It was accepted that the Final Act established a new, less dangerous setting for each side to pursue their foreign policy goals, though complaints and accusations would continue.

The Conference thus presented opportunities to generally enhance the international position and prestige of the Soviet Union in a way that bilateral

⁴⁷ Statement by Federal Minister Franke on the Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Cooperation Between the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union, October 7, 1975, *Documents on Germany*, 1944-1985, 1300-1301.

⁴⁸ Declaration of the Ambassadors of the Three Western Powers Regarding the Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Cooperation Between the U.S.S.R. and the German Democratic Republic. *ibid.*, 1301.

⁴⁹ Report by Chancellor Schmidt on Relations Between the Two German States, December 16, 1976, *ibid.*, 1304-1306.

agreements and recognitions could not. After the March, 1969 Warsaw Pact call for a conference, NATO in December endorsed the idea of holding a conference, and Multilateral Preparatory Talks began on November 22, 1972.⁵⁰ According to Brezhnev, the Conference, “for which the socialist countries have worked for many years, should open a new chapter in European history.”⁵¹ The Warsaw Pact was taking the initiative in foreign affairs and presenting itself as the leading advocate for international peace. Internationalism was an important element in the founding myths of the Soviet Union. In his speeches Brezhnev hailed the wisdom of Lenin’s vision of the peaceful coexistence of states with different social systems. He presented the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as the leader of an international working class movement.

Communist ideology was an important factor in Soviet decision-making as it formed the context through which Soviet leaders assessed state interests. Melvyn Leffler noted that “The leaders of the Kremlin were interested primarily in the power of their state and the survival of their regime, but any account that trivializes their faith in the superiority of their system or that obfuscates their conviction that they were engaged in a long-term systemic struggle misses an important part of their belief system.”⁵² Soviet leaders’ perception of the threats their country faced and the advances they made was shaped by their Communist ideology. By the 1970s Soviet ideology was not only competing against Western

⁵⁰ Romano, “The Main Task of the European Political Cooperation,” 124. Heraclides, *Security and Cooperation in Europe*, xiii.

⁵¹ Brezhnev, “The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,” 90.

⁵² Melvyn P. Leffler, “Bringing it Together,” in Westad ed., *Reviewing the Cold War* (London, 2000), 45-46.

capitalists and social democrats, but also against Maoism and anti-Soviet European Communist parties to be the international leader of the working class. By proposing the conference and then actively pushing for American involvement, Soviet leaders took the initiative in foreign relations and hoped to set peace on their terms. They took a step in reestablishing Europe as the primary theater of East-West confrontation, and hoped that by resolving tensions in Europe the Soviet Union would become more integrated into European politics. It was, to use the 1970 phrasing of the GDR, an ideological offensive that would increase the international magnetism of Soviet communism and exploit divisions among the capitalist states.⁵³

West European leaders met the challenge of a diplomatic contest with the Communist bloc by tenaciously arguing that provisions concerning human rights and the peaceful change of borders must be included in the Act. In addition to their desire to ease tensions and open up trade opportunities with the East, they also sought to establish the norms that at least in principle would define European identity. To members of the European Community, this meant some recognition of human rights as a basis for legitimacy.⁵⁴ They also saw greater openness as a way of establishing a more secure situation in Europe by fostering trust and understanding between different peoples. The West Germans argued for language allowing for peaceful change of frontiers in accordance with international law.

⁵³ Attitudes and Measures of the Warsaw Treaty States for Convening a Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, CWIHP.

⁵⁴ Notably, the European Community would not extend membership in the EC to the authoritarian regimes of Portugal, Spain, or Greece. Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 39, 50-51.

Although at times it may have seemed that the largely cohesive Eastern bloc had managed to set the Western allies against each other, the various positions held by West European countries meant that the Soviets would have to deal with numerous proposals and try to compromise with those least offensive to them. The West European approach to the conference took the diplomatic initiative away from the Soviet Union by proposing numerous principles to attach to peaceful coexistence. The Communist bloc had long proposed a European conference, and had just renewed their call for a conference, positioning themselves to the Eastern public and to the world as the leaders in international peace. For the Soviets to back out later, especially when it would have been clear they backed out over issues of human rights, free movement, and free exchange of information, would have been a defeat in the contest for international legitimacy.

The pursuit of competing concepts of European security and cooperation resulted in lengthy debate and revision interrupted by periods of stalling. The process was exacerbated by the fact that the Final Act would be issued in multiple languages, and delegates argued when translations used words that implied greater or less strictness or specificity. Principle 7, a series of statements on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, required more sessions than any of the other principles and took three months to negotiate. Even more difficult were the Basket III negotiations, which lasted from March 1973 to June 1975.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Heraclides, *Security and Cooperation in Europe*, 28, 32.

In general, as negotiations wore on, the drafters made language less specific, such as when they dropped “free movement of ideas” and adopted “Cooperation in Humanitarian and other fields.”⁵⁶ The insistence on including provisions for the peaceful change of frontiers, which was especially of interest to the West German delegation, was a major stumbling block. Brezhnev wanted the inviolability of borders to be the principle that stood above everything else, but the West Germans insisted that inviolability of borders be linked to the possibility of peaceful change. The placement of this clause in the document and even the punctuation of the clause became major sticking points.⁵⁷ The final outcome was to place the offending sentence within the first principle in the section Questions Relating to Security in Europe. It read “They consider that their frontiers can be changed, in accordance with international law, by peaceful means and by agreement.” Inviolability of frontiers was itself enumerated as Principle III.⁵⁸ Participants in the CSCE process, unlike Kissinger, took the language of the Act very seriously.

The Soviet leadership used a major conference because the attention it would garner most effectively achieved their goals of advancing their European diplomatic position and their international legitimacy while achieving a climactic conclusion to the Second World War. The spectacle of the conference made the long-delayed conclusion to the Second World War more climactic than it would

⁵⁶ Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 60.

⁵⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, December 15, 1974, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. 39, Doc 254.

⁵⁸ Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe: Final Act, *International Legal Materials*, 1293-1294.

have been with minor, gradual recognitions, and enhanced the prestige of the regime for which the War was a defining national moment. Brezhnev “could easily assess the potential publicity he would gain - above all, in his own country - when the Soviet public learned of the final settlement of the postwar boundaries for which they had sacrificed so much.”⁵⁹ If the goal was only to make agreements between national leaders, this could have been achieved through the continuation of bilateral and multilateral negotiations that were increasing diplomatic recognition and stability while the Conference was still being put together.⁶⁰ Taking a leading role in the CSCE meant the Soviets were taking on a leading role in Europe and showing to the world their initiative as internationalists and peacemakers. Brezhnev did not want to hide behind an iron curtain, but wanted to charm his way onto the world stage as a great statesman leading the international working class.

What the Communist participants in the CSCE traded for official recognition and the improvement of their international situation was the formal acceptance of West European human rights norms and greater openness to Western influence. They believed that this was a threat that they were well-equipped to deal with. As described above, the Treaty of Friendship contained an example of tightening the Eastern bloc to better ensure the success of Soviet socialism. Brezhnev’s speech to the CSCE on the eve of the signing of the Final Act showed the Soviet perception. It included the obligatory insistence that Lenin,

⁵⁹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 346.

⁶⁰ Examples include the 1970 treaty between the FRG and Poland and the 1972 treaty on the basis of relations between the GDR and the FRG. See also Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 212.

whom Brezhnev reminded the audience was the founder of the Soviet state, “fought with such conviction and consistency” for peaceful coexistence, a cause “for which our people are fighting to this day.”⁶¹ The “main conclusion” the Final Act presented to the future “is this: no one should try, from foreign policy considerations of one kind or another, to dictate to other peoples how they should manage their internal affairs.”⁶² This conclusion was supported by the United States. In a March 1975 letter to President Ford, Brezhnev noted his satisfaction in seeing a letter from Ford “justly state that inviolability of frontiers is the key element in ensuring security and cooperation in Europe.” Brezhnev hailed this “clear reaffirmation” by the President of the United States “that the US accepts without qualification the frontiers and territorial integrity of all European states.”⁶³ The Soviets held that the Final Act was a matter of securing peaceful coexistence by recognizing the borders of Eastern Europe, a major step forward in the campaign for peace initiated by the Communist bloc following Lenin’s course. Soviet success in achieving peace was supposed to not only safeguard the revolutions that the Communist party had already brought to fruition, but also to make Soviet socialism more attractive to the international working class.

The Soviet leadership believed that they could ensure the Final Act would be perceived as they wanted it to be, at least in their sphere of influence. Gromyko argued that the recognition of postwar boundaries would be a major political and

⁶¹ Brezhnev, “In the Name of Peace, Security, and Co-operation,” July 31, 1975, *Following Lenin’s Course*, 578.

⁶² *Ibid.*,” 581.

⁶³ Letter from Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev to President Ford, March 8, 1975, *FRUS* 1969-1976, Vol.39, Doc. 277.

propaganda victory, and the Basket II clauses would open up economic opportunities. He insisted that implementing the human rights commitments was up to the Soviet government, which was technically true as the Final Act was not legally binding. “We are masters in our own house,” he assured the Politburo. Brezhnev supported Gromyko, believing that the human rights elements of the Act could be downplayed with the help of the Party’s control of the press.⁶⁴ Ironically, news media in the United States generally reflected the view that Brezhnev won in Helsinki, and both the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* blasted the Ford administration for its acceptance of Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe.⁶⁵ This brings up the interesting speculative question of whether the Soviets would have agreed to the Final Act had the United States been more insistent on the issue of human rights. While the US probably could have derailed the Conference by taking a belligerent posture, it is possible that if the American delegation took an active, businesslike role like that of the West Europeans they could have made the CSCE process more effective and acceptable to the American public. In any case, more stable and open relations prevailed in Europe, and the Soviet Union accepted in principle that political legitimacy was based on respecting certain fundamental rights. Soviet leaders did not think this principle was much of a threat to their power and believed they had come out ahead in a difficult contest with the West.

⁶⁴ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 346.

⁶⁵ Morgan, “The United States and the Making of the Helsinki Final Act,” 166.

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe was a forum for the power struggles of international diplomacy. It was not a friendly summit but a peace settlement between acknowledged rivals where each side tried to secure peace on the most favorable terms possible. The Soviet goal of advancing their version of socialism through peaceful struggle was challenged by the Western European powers and their view of what was required for membership in the community of Europe. The CSCE showed the potential of détente not as surrender or mere acceptance of the political status quo, but as the pursuit of the international rivalry in an atmosphere of relaxing tensions. The CSCE also provided a venue for Western Europeans to assert what it meant to belong to Europe, in the face of one superpower and generally without the help of the other. The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe was part of an active process of changing the political situation in Europe by moving away from Cold War confrontation. Through transnational activism and the follow-up conferences called for in the Final Act, the CSCE would continue to affect the ideological contest as relations froze and thawed.

Chapter 2:

From Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985

The Soviet victory did not last long. The Soviet Union failed to establish its concept of the Helsinki Final Act at home or abroad. In fact, European détente “prompted and accelerated a set of challenges ‘from below’ that transformed the East-West relationship.”⁶⁶ Dissident activity in the Soviet Union increased and greater transnational contact between activists, reporters, and government officials increased pressure on the USSR. While repression and propaganda isolated the dissident movement, Soviet leaders were unable to present a positive program against the human rights ideals championed by the West and resorted to obstinacy in international relations by stonewalling in discussions of human rights and behaving defensively. With the Soviet Union on the defensive, CSCE Follow-Up Meetings provided a venue where the West could challenge the USSR and, in 1983, win further concessions on human rights. Nevertheless, the situation for dissidents, who faced more intimidation, arrests, and harsh sentences, as well as the prestige of the Soviet regime, deteriorated until Mikhail Gorbachev acceded to the post of General Secretary nearly ten years after the signing of the Final Act.

Immediately after the signing of the Accords, things seemed to be under control for Soviet leaders. They made minor improvements in compliance with Basket III in the fall of 1975, somewhat easing restrictions on Western journalists

⁶⁶ Jussi M. Hanhimäki, “Ironies and Turning Points, Détente in Perspective” in Westad ed. *Reviewing the Cold War* (London, 2000), 335.

and sales on Western newspapers.⁶⁷ While exit visa fees were lowered, fewer were issued in 1975, allowing the Soviets to point to superficial progress without making real concessions.⁶⁸ The Soviets also complained to the US that Western radio broadcasting into the Soviet Union was against the spirit of détente, and urged the US to relax restrictions on entry visas.⁶⁹ At first the Soviet Union was able to use the Final Act to its advantage.

Soon however, the Soviet Union found itself on the defensive when it came to human rights. The first blow was struck by dissidents within the USSR. As Anatoly Dobrynin described, “The condition of Soviet dissidents certainly did not change overnight, but they were definitely encouraged by this historic document.”⁷⁰ The passage of the Final Act did not turn things around 180 degrees for the dissident movement, but it did spark an era of heightened interest and attention. At first glance there appears to be continuity in the dissident movement before and after Helsinki. Organizations in defense of human rights had existed in the USSR before the convening of CSCE. A Committee for Defense of Human Rights was established in 1970 by Valery Chalidze, which included Sakharov among its members.⁷¹ The KGB reported that in 1975 “10,206 anti-Soviet, ideologically harmful and slanderous anonymous documents were prepared and

⁶⁷ Savranskaya, “Human Rights Movement in the USSR,” 32.

⁶⁸ Savranskaya, “Human Rights Movement in the USSR,” 32. Beckerman, *When They Come For Us*, 327.

⁶⁹ Record of Conversation with U.S. Attaché In the USSR Jack Matlock, From the Diary of Kornienko G. M., November 12, 1975, National Security Archive (gwu.edu/~nsarchiv), The Moscow Helsinki Group 30th Anniversary, English Doc 3.

⁷⁰ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 346.

⁷¹ About the Hostile Actions of the So-called Group for Assistance of Implementation of the Helsinki Agreements in the USSR, November 15, 1976, National Security Archive, MHG 30th Anniversary, English Doc 8.

distributed by 1,629 authors,” In addition, the KGB uncovered “53 hostile nationalistic and anti-social groups with 182 participants.” Even more had allegedly been uncovered in 1974, a year before the Act was signed⁷² Already in 1971 there was an emphasis on human rights and transnational contact with Sakharov as a focal point of activity and communication. A KGB report from 1971 decries Sakharov’s contacts with West and the use of Western broadcasts to boost publicity for the “so-called” Human Rights Committee, warns of a stream of letters to Sakharov and the committee offering support and complaints about officials, and describes Sakharov’s apartment as becoming a place of pilgrimage for people who have trouble with the regime. Some citizens allegedly came from remote regions of the country to Moscow specifically to meet him.⁷³

By the early 1970s the KGB had developed a particularly effective system of crackdowns on dissent. It relied not only on the time-tested methods of infiltration and informers but on a more systematized kind of intimidation, referred to as “prophylactic work,” and the increased use of pseudo-psychiatry to denigrate, isolate, and sometimes mentally torture determined dissenters.⁷⁴ The KGB reported that in 1975, they subjected about 20,000 people who committed “politically harmful actions that did not contain a criminal intent,” to prophylactic work, had over 25 dissidents, including Zionists, exiled from the country, and

⁷² On the Results of Search for Authors of Anti-Soviet Anonymous Documents in 1975, March 13, 1976, National Security Archive, MHG 30th Anniversary, English Doc 8.

⁷³ Andropov to the Central Committee. Sakharov’s broadening activity, April 17, 1971, Yale Annals of Communism (yale.edu/annals), Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 28.

⁷⁴ Savranskaya, “Human Rights Movement in the USSR,” 29-30.

subjected 486 people to criminal punishment for political activity.⁷⁵ One must be careful, however, when relying on reports from the KGB to the political authorities. Yuri Andropov, who became KGB director in 1967, was not above exaggerating, as the experience of Czechoslovakia shows. Unfortunately, internal KGB reports are harder to access. However, even if reports were distorted to create a sense of alarm, KGB reports clearly show that the highest authorities were concerned with the dissident movement.

In addition to dissidents, the KGB was also concerned about refuseniks, some of whom would become prominent human rights activists. Refuseniks lived a precarious existence as their applications for exit visas typically caused them to lose their jobs and become bigger targets for anti-Semitic abuse. While refuseniks and dissidents were distinct groups, the lines were often blurred, exemplified by the case of Anatoly Shcharansky. Shcharansky had tried to emigrate in 1973 and soon became involved in Jewish cultural life. Like many Jews, his application was not approved. He then put his good English to work communicating with the West and serving as Sakharov's interpreter, and later helped found the Moscow Helsinki Group. His public participation in the Group brought greater attention to the plight of Soviet Jews and his subsequent imprisonment became a major rallying call for human rights activists and Jewish advocates.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Report on the Work of the Committee For State Security in 1975, March 30, 1976, National Security Archive, MHG 30th Anniversary, English Doc 7.

⁷⁶ Beckerman, *When They Come For Us*, 313, 324, 391-393. Sakharov, *Memoirs*, 468

Despite a superficial appearance of continuity in dissident life, the CSCE process did support an increase in dissident activity and attention given to it. By 1973 the Conference was already underway, and Soviet leaders were greatly concerned with relations with the West. Concern with the CSCE appears to be referred to when the KGB warns that Sakharov “persistently appeals to the West not to embark on the course of rapprochement with the USSR without ‘extracting from Soviet leadership concessions’ of an ideological and political nature.” Through contacts in Western media Sakharov encouraged the West to not give the Soviets what they wanted unless they agreed to improved human rights standards. The KGB warned that punitive measures against Sakharov would “lead to vigorous anti-Soviet outcries in the West, and may be met with less than full understanding by some fraternal parties.” It would also require “additional explanations inside the country.”⁷⁷ The international spotlight of the CSCE was troublesome for Soviet authorities. Shortly before signing the Final Act, they expressed concern that Sakharov would damage their prestige. With his “distinctly provocative behavior” he hoped “either to press his point with the help of the world community or to damage the prestige of the Soviet state on the eve of the European conference.”⁷⁸ Soviet internal behavior became more dependent on foreign relations as the CSCE put more attention on their failures to maintain international human rights standards.

⁷⁷ Chebrikov and Rudenko to Kosygin; Proposals on how to deal with Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, September 28, 1973, Yale Annals of Communism, Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 64.

⁷⁸ Andropov to the Central Committee; Bonner receives permission to travel abroad, July 18, 1975, Yale Annals of Communism, Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 98.

Sakharov himself perceived the importance of the CSCE and acted accordingly. The KGB noted that by December 1975, when Sakharov met with foreign journalists he “continually expressed the idea” that the Helsinki conference presented opportunities for exerting pressure on the USSR. He told a British journalist, “It is now very important to increase the pressure of the world public opinion in defense of human rights in the Soviet Union...after the Helsinki conference and after the award of the [Nobel] Peace Prize to me, I hope better conditions have been created for such activity.” Sakharov explained that “the task of the West is to use the tools it has at hand to assist the Soviet Union in fulfilling its obligations.”⁷⁹

Additionally, increased media attention owing to the CSCE changed how the dissident movement operated. Much more international attention was paid to the dissidents, and Soviet citizens could learn about them from foreign broadcasts. One dissident wrote that the situation changed so dramatically that he no longer had to find ways to interest the press in statements by refuseniks or dissidents, as now “the correspondents literally tore them out of my hands.”⁸⁰ Space was opened up for dissent as a result of the Soviet Union’s conflicting commitment between internal domination and good appearances required for effective foreign policy.

⁷⁹ Andropov to the Central Committee; Appeals to Western Communist parties and the need for continuing internal repression, December 29, 1975, Yale Annals of Communism, Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 108.

⁸⁰ Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War*, 65.

The Final Act served as a unifying platform and legitimizing document for dissidents in the USSR, made more potent by the fact that they were championing a document carrying Leonid Brezhnev's signature. Activists within the USSR soon established groups that based their platform on Helsinki principles.⁸¹ The Act served to forge "a common ideological basis" between a variety of oppositional groups, including religious freedom activists.⁸² Human rights activists used the Final Act as their own set of principles. On May 13, 1976, Yuri Orlov founded The Public Group to Support Compliance with the Helsinki Accords in the USSR, often referred to as the Moscow Helsinki Group, in Moscow.⁸³

Yuri Orlov was no stranger to trouble. In the wake of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, Orlov got on the authorities' bad side for a speech he delivered, a major theme of which was democracy on a foundation of socialism.⁸⁴ After the "Czech tragedy" he felt he "had to do something," and contacted the Moscow dissidents. He met Sakharov in 1973 and shortly afterward got involved in the founding of the Soviet Amnesty International Group. After being fired from the scientific institute, he sent a protest letter to the Soviet Academy of Sciences as well as to foreign correspondents because "without pressure from abroad any internal protest was useless."⁸⁵

⁸¹ Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War*, 66.

⁸² Savranskaya, "Human Rights Movement in the USSR," 31.

⁸³ Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War*, 57.

⁸⁴ Orlov, *Dangerous Thoughts*, 119.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 156, 161, 168, 170.

The Moscow Helsinki Group immediately went to work providing documentation to Western governments, while foreign radio broadcasts raised awareness of the group and encouraged more Soviet citizens to appeal to international organizations in defense of their rights. Orlov considered nearly all the original members of the Moscow Helsinki Group to be “veterans” of the human rights movement. He viewed the purpose of the group as changing what he called the “Munich” approach of the West to détente. According to Orlov, “all the democratic dissidents understood that only democratization of the USSR...could ensure mutual security.”⁸⁶ The effectiveness of Helsinki commitments needed to be nurtured by the dissident effect on Helsinki implementation. It gave the Act grassroots meaning beyond international posturing.

While Sakharov supported the Moscow Helsinki Group, he preferred operating independently to his previous experience with political groups. He would sign documents that he agreed with and assist group members. Sakharov’s wife, Elena Bonner, joined the group and became one of its most active members. Though Sakharov had expressed anti-regime ideas independently, Bonner became an important influence and partner after the two activists met in 1970. Soviet authorities would unsuccessfully attempt to split the dynamic couple by creating and spreading rumors, which they may have partially believed, that Bonner was

⁸⁶ Orlov, *Dangerous Thoughts*, 194-195.

unfaithful, unstable, and greedy, or that she was an agent of international Zionism poisoning Sakharov's mind.⁸⁷

Shortly before founding the Moscow Helsinki Group, Orlov had met Millicent Fenwick, a recently elected US Congresswoman traveling as part of an official delegation to the USSR. He suggested to her that the West should use the Helsinki Accords to pressure the Soviet government to honor its human rights commitments and monitor compliance. Fenwick's numerous meetings with Soviet dissidents and refuseniks, which she described as "heartbreaking," encouraged her to initiate legislation to create the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, a joint congressional-executive body to monitor compliance with the Final Act. The Commission was established with Ford's signature on June 3, 1976. Under the active leadership of Congressman Dante Fascell, the Commission established compliance with the Final Act as a concern of the US government. The Soviets opposed the establishment of the Commission on the grounds that it was interfering in internal Soviet affairs and its emphasis on Basket III was not in line with the CSCE principle that all baskets were equally important.⁸⁸ Fenwick had been involved in the civil rights movement prior to entering elected office,

⁸⁷ Bonner was partly of Jewish descent. Sakharov raged in his memoirs at those who peddled the line of Soviet authorities. Since he died in 1989 he was probably unaware the KGB reported to the Politburo that Bonner was constantly abusive toward him and made it appear that he went on fake hunger strikes to relax in the hospital away from her. Sakharov, *Memoirs*, 585; Chebrikov to the Central Committee; Sakharov leaves the hospital, July 20, 1985, Yale Annals of Communism, Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 180.

⁸⁸ Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War*, 40-48.

and would later consider the Commission on Human Rights to be the most important part of her congressional career.⁸⁹

The United States government soon took the offensive on human rights, rather than downplaying human rights concerns as the Nixon and Ford administrations had. Typically the language of the Final Act would be used and its commitments would be referred to. The increase in Soviet dissident activity coincided with changing attitudes toward the Final Act and a new presidential administration in the United States. Sakharov appealed to the Final Act in letters to Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter during the 1976 presidential campaign, arguing that human rights were inseparable from problems of international peace or economic progress. He also stated that the Helsinki agreement “opens new opportunities for international initiatives, such as, for example, the struggle for a general worldwide amnesty of political prisoners.”⁹⁰ The Carter administration took up the task of pushing hard for Helsinki compliance. While Carter had initially opposed the signing of the Final Act, during his campaign he began to see it as a useful tool in challenging the Soviet Union’s human rights record. Shortly after taking office, Carter pressed Brezhnev to comply with the Helsinki accords, “We expect cooperation in the realization of further steps toward the fulfillment

⁸⁹ Robert H. Miller Interview with Millicent Fenwick, December 17, 1985, The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST), Women Ambassador Series, Library of Congress (LOC).

⁹⁰ Andropov to the Central Committee; Sakharov's letters to Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter during the presidential campaign, September 19, 1976, Yale Annals of Communism, Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 117.

of the agreements reached in Helsinki relating to human rights.” He invited “personal, confidential exchanges of views on these delicate questions.”⁹¹

Human rights were central to Carter’s foreign policy agenda. In his inaugural address, which he drafted himself, he proclaimed that human rights constituted “the new reality of our time” and “because we are free, we can never be indifferent to the fate of freedom elsewhere.”⁹² Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter’s national security advisor, wrote in his memoir that Carter “came to the presidency with a determination to make foreign policy more humane and moral.” He “deeply believed in human rights and that commitment remained constant during his administration.”⁹³ Brzezinski considered one of his primary objectives to increase America’s ideological impact on the world, with a heavy emphasis on human rights. He believed that the US should “redefine détente into a more purposeful and activist policy for the West” and saw in human rights “an opportunity to put the Soviet Union ideologically on the defensive.” He viewed the USSR as becoming increasingly assertive under détente, and referenced statements by Soviet officials like, “the policy of peaceful coexistence has nothing in common with the ‘freezing’ of the social status quo, with any artificial mothballing of the revolutionary process.”⁹⁴ Brzezinski credits Carter’s policy with establishing human rights as a global concern and having a major impact on

⁹¹ Carter’s Letter to Brezhnev, February 14, 1977. CWIHP, US-Soviet Relations.

⁹² Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 263.

⁹³ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981*. (New York, 1983), 48-49.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3, 147-148.

US allies to relax repression, including releases of political prisoners in Latin America.⁹⁵

According to historian Svetlana Savranskaya, Carter's interest in human rights made him "undoubtedly the most respected foreigner among Soviet human rights activists."⁹⁶ Shortly after Carter's inauguration, Sakharov wrote to him drawing attention to human rights abuses in the Soviet Union and listing a number of political prisoners the US should make a priority.⁹⁷ The administration responded with a "carefully worded reply" that nonetheless met condemnation from Brezhnev as "correspondence with a renegade who proclaimed himself an enemy of the Soviet state."⁹⁸ Sakharov wrote years later that Carter's commitment to human rights still appeared to have been "serious and sincere," and regretted only that the Carter administration did not always act on this conviction in the most effective manner.⁹⁹

The US government was not alone in responding to Soviet dissidents. An extensive movement emerged that used the final act as its founding ideology.¹⁰⁰ An important group was the United States Helsinki Watch Committee, which maintained contact with Helsinki activists in Eastern and Western Europe, publicized failures to comply with the Final Act, and compiled reports that could

⁹⁵ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 128-129.

⁹⁶ Savranskaya, "Human Rights Movement in the USSR," 35.

⁹⁷ Sakharov, *Memoirs*, 464.

⁹⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 155-156.

⁹⁹ Sakharov had been invited to write the letter by Martin Garbus, an American lawyer. He believed the letter would be kept private, though he was not unhappy that it was publicized. Sakharov, *Memoirs*, 464.

¹⁰⁰ Savranskaya, "Human Rights Movement in the USSR," 26.

be used in negotiation. Helsinki Watch proclaimed its mission as “monitoring US compliance with the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Accords and monitoring the freedom of others to do the same in their countries.” Its first annual report raised issues of discrimination, civil liberties abuses, and rights of untried prisoners in the United States and describes harsh repression in the Soviet bloc.¹⁰¹ Sometimes Helsinki Watch and similar groups could more effectively exert pressure in individual cases than states could, as image-conscious governments that would stand firm in the face of pressure from an adversary might otherwise be amenable to public opinion.¹⁰²

While Helsinki Watch often worked with the US government, providing information and advice, its reports suggest that human rights groups were independent actors with interests that did not always align with the governments they worked with. Helsinki Watch’s 1983 report noted that during the Carter administration and the early years of the Reagan administration, the organization enjoyed good relations with the State Department and its bureau of human rights because their emphasis on human rights violations in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe suited US foreign policy objectives. Cooperation decreased when Helsinki Watch raised concerns of human rights violations in non-aligned Yugoslavia, and when Helsinki Watch addressed human rights problems in Turkey, it “came into direct conflict with the State Department.” Turkey was an

¹⁰¹ “Helsinki Watch Committee: The First Fifteen Months,” US Helsinki Watch Committee, 1980, 9-11. Human Rights Watch Archives, Series VIII, Box 1, General Files New York, Helsinki Watch Annual Report (1979), Center for Human Rights Documentation and Research, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

¹⁰² Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*, 126-127.

important NATO member and a major recipient of US aid. The State Department maintained that Turkey was in a transition to democracy, and Helsinki Watch was unable to gain much support in Congress for condemning Turkey's human rights practices. Helsinki Watch charged that "the Reagan Administration's selective human rights policy has destroyed its credibility in the West and its effectiveness in promoting human rights in the Eastern bloc countries," and cooperated with Americas Watch and the Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights to publish a report "Failure: the Reagan Administration's Human Rights Policy in 1983."¹⁰³ A later report on the Reagan administration's human rights record "found that the Administration was vigorous in denouncing abuses in countries aligned with the Soviet Union or considered hostile to the US, but that these denunciations were not part of an even-handed effort to promote human rights worldwide, and were thus not as effective as they could have been."¹⁰⁴ The CSCE inspired a flowering of non-government groups taking responsibility for advocating Soviet human rights improvement. As these groups were independent actors, they did not always take the same positions as the governments they lobbied and were able to serve as continual institutions for maintaining concern on human rights in the CSCE outside of the East-West contest.

While Helsinki activists were the most involved in promoting overall Helsinki compliance, other private individuals and organizations pressured the

¹⁰³ "Annual Report 1983," 22-23, Series VIII, Box 1, Helsinki Watch Annual Report, 1983. Center for Human Rights Documentation and Research, RBML, Columbia University.

¹⁰⁴ "In the face of cruelty: the Reagan Administration's Human Rights record in 1984," discussion in 1985 Annual Report, 25-26, Series VIII, Box 1, Helsinki Watch Annual Report, 1985. Center for Human Rights Documentation and Research, RBML, Columbia University.

Soviet Union's human rights record, often referencing the Final Act. Scientific and professional groups responded to the persecution of their counterparts in the USSR by pledging to avoid working with the USSR, which was in need of Western technology, until political prisoners were freed.¹⁰⁵ Pressure from groups of Western psychiatrists on Soviet punitive psychiatry was enough of a concern that the KGB organized a campaign to counter it.¹⁰⁶ By the 1970s, thousands of American Jews had mobilized and marched in support of the rights of Soviet Jews.¹⁰⁷ French citizens, especially trade unionists, Trotskyists, and the anti-authoritarian left supported East European oppositionists, including by providing clandestine support to Poland's Solidarity movement.¹⁰⁸ Statements by Western communist parties broadcast by Western radio into the Soviet Union were particularly troubling for Soviet leaders. The KGB recorded Sakharov as saying "The position of the Italian communists corresponds to our views and opinions."¹⁰⁹ In February 1976, they expressed concerns about the views that "Communist party leaders of some capitalist countries hold on the question of democracy."¹¹⁰ Self-proclaimed communists criticizing or denouncing the Soviet Union threatened the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's pretensions of being

¹⁰⁵ Beckerman, *When They Come for Us*, 393.

¹⁰⁶ On Measures to Counteract the Anti-Soviet Campaign Being Conducted in the West in Connection with the 'Use of Psychiatry in the USSR for Political Purposes,' Ministry of Health of the USSR. Sept 10 1976. Trans Marta Olynyk, July 2010. Soviet Archives, www.bukovsky-archives.net, 3.6/0204-Eng, Retrieved Apr 5, 2012.

¹⁰⁷ Beckerman, *When They Come For Us*, 215.

¹⁰⁸ Bent Boel, "French Support for Eastern European Dissidence, 1968-1989" in Westad and Villame, 222-225.

¹⁰⁹ Andropov to the Central Committee; Appeals to Western Communist parties and the need for continuing internal repression, December 29, 1975, Yale Annals of Communism, Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 108.

¹¹⁰ Andropov to the Central Committee; The challenge posed by ongoing dissent, February 16, 1976. Yale Annals of Communism, Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 110.

the leader of global proletarian revolution. Helsinki activism took place within a broader context of non-government transnational activism for upholding human rights in the USSR, and the various currents of activism reinforced each other.

Soviet leaders did not respond favorably to pressure over their human rights record. They had a different idea of human rights than the views prevailing in the West and considered attempts to change their human rights policy to be interference in their internal affairs that offended the spirit of détente. A draft letter to Dobrynin from the central committee celebrated the Soviet Union's guarantee of "the right for work, education, social security, free medical assistance, and retirement to all Soviet citizens" and decried "multi-million unemployment, deprivation of rights of ethnic minorities, race discrimination, unequal rights for women, the violation of citizens rights by the state organs, the persecution of people with progressive convictions" in the West as well as "systematic support by the USA of dictatorial, anti-populist regimes in some countries."¹¹¹ KGB officials reported that human rights activism in the Soviet Union was caused by foreign interference. They warned that "the adversary's special and propaganda services" were trying to create the appearance of "a so-called 'internal opposition.'" in the USSR. The foreign conspirators allegedly provided support for "those inspiring antisocial trends," and "encouraged bringing

¹¹¹ Secretary of the Central Committee to the Soviet Ambassador, February 18, 1977, CWIHP, US-Soviet Relations.

together the participants of various tendencies of anti-Soviet activities.”¹¹²

Communist Party ideology colored the leadership’s perception of rights, their perception of failures to uphold rights in the West, and the nature of the threat the regime faced from human rights activism.

Helsinki activists in the USSR would not escape prosecution for long. Yuri Orlov described that they were active for almost nine months while the KGB was “busy preparing big cases against us.”¹¹³ The KGB maintained that the Helsinki groups inflicted “serious political damage on the Soviet state”¹¹⁴ and needed to be suppressed. In January 1977 the KGB urged the Central Committee of the CPSU to approve arrests. Noting that the Moscow Helsinki group had not been deterred by warnings, they emphasized the need to “take more decisive measures.” The existence of a threat to the Soviet system was implied by the KGB’s argument that punitive measures would influence the situation in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and other allied countries “which are presently being subjected to mass pressure from both hostile internal elements and international imperialism.”¹¹⁵ Orlov was arrested in February 1977 and sent to a brutal labor camp after a farcical trial. He remained in the camp until February 1984 when he was moved to a remote Siberian village, an improvement he thought was likely

¹¹² About the Hostile Actions of the So-called Group for Assistance of Implementation of the Helsinki Agreements in the USSR, 15 November 1976, GWU National Security Archive, MHG 30th Anniversary, English Doc 8.

¹¹³ Orlov, *Dangerous Thoughts*, 196.

¹¹⁴ About measures to end the hostile activity of members of the so-called “Group For Assistance in the Implementation of The Helsinki Agreements in the USSR,” January 5, 1977, National Security Archive, MHG 30th Anniversary, English Doc 10.

¹¹⁵ On Measures for the Curtailment of the Criminal Activities of Orlov, Ginsburg, Rudenko and Ventslova, January 20, 1977, National Security Archive, MHG 30th Anniversary, English Doc 11.

due to pressure exerted by Moscow dissidents and Westerners, particularly scientists. He was eventually exiled to the United States.¹¹⁶

Human rights advocacy complicated East-West relations, but it was far from the only reason for the breakdown of détente. Soviet leaders acknowledged that the trial of dissidents Anatoly Scharansky and Alexander Ginzburg was a major complicating factor in US-Soviet relations.¹¹⁷ Brzezinski recalled that Soviet imprisonment of human rights activists hurt Soviet relations with Carter. The trial of Shcharansky and Ginzburg, “both of whom enjoyed enormous popularity” in the US, complicated a technology transfer deal. Ethnic groups, especially Jews, tended to favor being hard on the Soviets, but “the business community generally opposed any linkage between politics and trade.”¹¹⁸ However, the superpowers had other concerns as well. When Brezhnev decried the “growing aggression of the foreign policy of the Carter government” at a 1978 Politburo meeting, he mentioned “attempts at clumsy interference in our internal affairs,” but most of his concerns revolved around the arms race and US relations with their rival China.¹¹⁹ Many of the concerns the leaders of the superpowers expressed to each other revolved around questions of armaments and interventions or deployments of forces around the globe.¹²⁰ Human rights

¹¹⁶ Orlov, *Dangerous Thoughts*, 215, 262.

¹¹⁷ Excerpt from Transcript, Meeting of East German leader Erich Honecker and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in Crimea, July 25, 1978, CWIHP, US-Soviet Relations.

¹¹⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 322-323, 338.

¹¹⁹ Speech by L.I. Brezhnev to CPSU CC Politburo, June 8, 1978, CWIHP, US-Soviet Relations.

¹²⁰ Record of Conversation between Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko and President Carter, September 23, 1977, CWIHP, US-Soviet Relations.

differences were one element of East-West conflict that reduced trust between the superpowers within a broader ideological and geopolitical contest.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, CSCE Follow-up Meetings were the scenes of diplomatic wrangling over the place of human rights in international relations. The Final Act contained provisions for periodic follow-up meetings to the conference in Helsinki, where delegates would review compliance with Final Act provisions and discuss ways to improve inter-European relations. The CSCE was a process which after 1975 “had to come up with concrete results in the form of commitments which would go beyond previous undertakings” in order to validate its continued existence as an institution.¹²¹ The focus on the human dimension in the CSCE underscored the international concern for human rights and other humanitarian issues. It was a shift that put relations between the individual and the state on the same diplomatic level as state-to-state relations, “thus raising the individual to the pan-European plane.”¹²² Heraclides characterizes Principle Seven as stating “classical absolutes” of human rights while Basket III focused on applying these absolutes into narrower, specific, “more modest undertakings.” In CSCE follow-up meetings, an emphasis on the “absolutes” of Principle Seven corresponded to the absolutist expression of principles by the United States delegation, while West Europeans tended to take a more gradualist approach

¹²¹ Heraclides, *Security and Cooperation in Europe*, 3

¹²² *Ibid.*, 2.

addressing incremental improvements, corresponding to the ideals of Basket III.¹²³

CSCE follow-ups functioned as forums of East-West confrontation. Human rights failures of NATO member Turkey and non-aligned Yugoslavia were rarely mentioned by Western delegations, and Romania, the most independent member of the Warsaw Pact but hardly the least repressive, generally received less criticism from the West than did the Soviet Union or its closer allies.¹²⁴ The US approach to human rights fit Brzezinski's paradigm of increasing the political cost for the Soviets of behavior the US considered harmful, partly through "continued insistence on human rights as part of the ideological competition."¹²⁵ The US delegation to the first follow-up meeting, held in Belgrade from October 4, 1977 to March 8 1978, was headed by Arthur Goldberg, an experienced lawyer, former Supreme Court justice, secretary of labor, and ambassador to the United Nations.¹²⁶ Goldberg emphatically established human rights as a major concern of the CSCE and employed research from Helsinki activists to lambast the Soviet Union and its allies for human rights failures,

¹²³ Heraclides, *Security and Cooperation in Europe*, 40.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 47, 52.

¹²⁵ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 188.

¹²⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote that he lobbied for Goldberg to head the delegation knowing that Goldberg would make a major impact. Max Kampelman, who would head later CSCE delegations, said that the post was actually given to Goldberg as consolation for being edged out of negotiations that Brzezinski and Secretary of State Vance wanted bigger roles in. Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 300; Charles Stuart Kennedy Interview with Ambassador Max M. Kampelman, June 24, 2003, ADST, LOC.

taking an approach that even Western allies sometimes considered overly aggressive.¹²⁷

Before the next CSCE follow-up meeting, East-West relations were hurt by events which drew the iron curtain tighter, making it harder for diplomats and dissidents to achieve their goals. On Christmas Eve 1979, six months after after Carter and Brezhnev met in Vienna, Soviet military forces entered Afghanistan. With Brezhnev's health in decline, Soviet policy was increasingly under the influence of Gromyko, Andropov, and the hawkish defense minister Dmitry Ustinov, but Brezhnev ultimately signed off on the strike. Shocked by the brash show of force and believing that the Soviets intended to move on the Persian Gulf and its oil resources, Carter froze relations with the Soviets, imposed a grain embargo, and announced a boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games. Western Europe, though not as immediately or harshly as the US, cooled relations with the USSR.¹²⁸ The heightened mistrust and hostility

The United States continued its confrontational approach at the second CSCE Follow-up meeting, this time with a delegation headed by Max Kampelman. Burdened by heightened Cold War tensions as well as the continuing inability to agree on human rights commitments, the Madrid Follow-up Meeting lasted from November 1980 to September 1983. Kampelman, with years of political involvement behind him, was working privately as a lawyer in 1980 when Vice President Mondale invited him to head the delegation at Madrid,

¹²⁷ Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*, 100-104

¹²⁸ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 227-228, 259.

promising it would only be a few months of service. In a 2003 interview Kampelman admitted that at first he did not know what was going on in Madrid. After speaking for a bit he realized it was a follow up to the conference attended by Arthur Goldberg three years earlier in Belgrade. Despite recalling that Goldberg considered it a miserable experience, he agreed to go.¹²⁹ He viewed his mission as the “same kind of fight” as the struggle of “Communism versus Democracy” he had experienced in the labor movement and in the Democratic Party of Minnesota in the immediate post-war era. The United States, “had to take a leadership position” in the role of promoting democracy and human rights.¹³⁰

US-Soviet relations did not improve with the election of Ronald Reagan, a longtime advocate of tougher relations with the USSR. Reagan, however, was not only a staunch Cold Warrior who ratcheted up the arms race and ramped up anti-Communist rhetoric and interventions, but also an idealist with the conviction that a strong America would prevail because its way of life would prove more attractive. Unlike many of his advisors he saw value in negotiating with the Soviet Union. His June 1982 appointment of George Shultz to replace Alexander Haig as Secretary of State began to shift the balance toward cooperation. Though Reagan would famously call the Soviet Union an “evil empire” in March of 1983, he privately assured Shultz that he supported Shultz’s approach to engaging in

¹²⁹ Charles Stuart Kennedy Interview with Ambassador Max M. Kampelman, June 24, 2003.

¹³⁰ Morris Weisz Interview with Max M. Kampelman, June 04, 1993, ADST, LOC.

constructive dialogue with Soviet leaders.¹³¹ Shultz, however, would be given little room to act on new ideas until Reagan's second term.¹³²

Kampelman's ability to work with the Reagan administration demonstrated continuity in the US approach to the CSCE from Carter to Reagan, which was not entirely expected. Reagan, in a 1976 address, had lambasted the Final Act as "putting our stamp of approval on Russia's enslavement of the captive nations."¹³³ Yet Reagan came to see the Final Act as a useful tool in pressuring the Soviets. Kampelman, despite his longtime affiliation with the Democratic Party, was kept at his post after Reagan took office in 1981. Reagan's first Secretary of State, Alexander Haig expressed approval for Kampelman's work and encouraged him to continue.¹³⁴ Kampelman and Reagan did have a political affinity; both, for example, were members of the Committee on the Present Danger, a bipartisan foreign policy group that supported military buildup and taking a hard line against the USSR.¹³⁵

In light of the criticism of Reagan's human rights record by Helsinki Watch and others, it would seem plausible to conclude that the Reagan administration was hypocritical and only used human rights issues to berate the Soviets. Even Dobrynin wrote that neither Reagan nor Haig were especially committed to the rights of Soviet dissidents (in contrast to Carter), although they

¹³¹ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 351-354.

¹³² Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 8-9.

¹³³ Ronald Reagan Attacks Détente, March 31 1976. Hanhimaki and Westad, *The Cold War: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts*, 534.

¹³⁴ Charles Stuart Kennedy Interview with Ambassador Max M. Kampelman, June 24, 2003.

¹³⁵ Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*, 137-138.

would play that card from time to time.¹³⁶ However, it is likely that the longtime investment in anti-Communist ideology led Reagan and many of his advisors to believe that Soviet power was a greater threat to freedom than anything that a capitalist or non-aligned state would do. Reagan's focus on the Pentecostal Christians trying to flee Soviet persecution and his increasing warmth as political prisoners were released suggested that Soviet human rights violations were major impediments for him to trust the Soviet Union. Many of his advisors, however, remained convinced that the goal of the Soviet Union was global Communist domination and the cause of freedom required supporting a lesser evil here and there.

As the Madrid meeting languished, Kampelman was able to employ quiet diplomacy as well as grandstanding condemnation. He had gone to Madrid intent on naming names and challenging the Soviet bloc. When West German foreign minister Genscher, remembering the experience with Goldberg, expressed concern prior to the opening of the meeting, Kampelman told him to think of the NATO bloc as an orchestra: "We're going to blow the horn. If you don't want to blow the horn, you do it your way. But let's make music together."¹³⁷ Kampelman was also able to employ quiet diplomacy. Desiring to have more than a statement come out of Madrid, Kampelman proposed to President Reagan that he quietly push the USSR for the release of political prisoners. The United States would not allow the passage of a concluding document for the Madrid meeting unless an

¹³⁶ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 497.

¹³⁷ Charles Stuart Kennedy Interview with Ambassador Max M. Kampelman, June 24, 2003.

acceptable list of political prisoners was released. Reagan approved, and suggested a number of Pentecostal Christians taking refuge in the US embassy as well as a number of Jewish refuseniks. According to Kampelman, the KGB officer at Madrid insisted on secrecy. Kampelman was not to tell anybody about the deal they were making except Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz. When Kampelman asked if Dobrynin should be informed, he was told, “No, he sticks his nose into everything.” After a series of negotiations the US secured the release of numerous political prisoners. The Madrid CSCE Follow-Up began the US practice of requiring tangible human rights progress, usually the release of prisoners, before making concessions to the Soviets.¹³⁸

Finally, after a recess from February to November 1982 in protest of the imposition of martial law in Poland, and with the cloud of the Soviets’ downing of a Korean airliner hanging over the proceedings, the Madrid meeting closed on September 9, 1983.¹³⁹ Kampelman later characterized the meeting as taking advantage of an “ought.” With the Final Act asserting the ways countries ought to behave, signatories had the right to say, “Move your 'is' to the 'ought'.”¹⁴⁰ The concluding document signed at Madrid by delegates from the the 35 CSCE states supplemented the Final Act with more explicit protocols and expectations for human rights and human contacts.¹⁴¹ At the first CSCE Follow-Up, the West, led by Goldberg, established human rights compliance as a primary concern of CSCE

¹³⁸ Charles Stuart Kennedy Interview with Ambassador Max M. Kampelman, June 24, 2003. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*, 144-146.

¹³⁹ Snyder, *Human Rights Activism* 149.

¹⁴⁰ Charles Stuart Kennedy Interview with Ambassador Max M. Kampelman, June 24, 2003.

¹⁴¹ Heraclides, *Security and Cooperation in Europe*, 66-69.

follow-ups. The Madrid meeting built on this commitment as NATO members practiced greater cohesion than they did at Belgrade and secured more explicit commitments while quiet diplomacy by the US delegation secured the release of political prisoners.

Transnational activism helped put the Soviet Union on the defensive in Madrid even more than was the case in Belgrade. Dozens of NGOs and numerous dissidents, human rights activists, and ethnic group representatives attended the Madrid conference. Helsinki Watch, active throughout the meeting, held press conferences and published editorials, establishing the importance of human rights compliance in the public discourse.¹⁴² Activists also influenced the Madrid meeting by providing the delegations with information on violations. Kampelman characterized his approach to the meeting as acting like a lawyer. Whether discussing anti-Semitism, trade unions, psychiatric abuse, or any other topic, he wanted to have numerous examples to point to, and not just raise charges. He believed this approach made confrontation more acceptable to US allies “because I wasn't engaged in insults, but facts.”¹⁴³

US-led condemnation in the CSCE process put Soviet leaders on the defensive. In Madrid, the Eastern bloc tried to move the debate away from compliance with past agreements by emphasizing new proposals. Generally they took a defensive posture of protesting “interference” in their internal affairs.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*, 151-152.

¹⁴³ Morris Weisz Interview with Max M. Kampelman, June 04, 1993, ADST, LOC.

¹⁴⁴ Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*, 102, 105.

The Soviets had lost the initiative in international diplomacy. Despite the apparent triumph at Helsinki they found their hegemony was being challenged.

After the breakdown of détente, human rights advocacy in the CSCE framework continued to have an effect, although the fate of Soviet dissidents was generally grim. Reports on human rights in the USSR grew increasingly bleak in the first half of the 1980s. In 1982, Soviet authorities moved to suppress the few remaining members of the Moscow Helsinki Group and in September the Moscow Helsinki Group declared that it would discontinue its activities.¹⁴⁵ However, the Soviet Union continued to be sensitive to outside pressure on human rights. Amid renewed Cold War tensions in 1983, the US CSCE delegation secured the release of several Soviet political prisoners. During this period the situation of children in religious families improved somewhat.¹⁴⁶

In addition to diplomacy and political activism centered on international conferences, the CSCE also strengthened pressures for change in the USSR by fostering increases in social and cultural contacts. The Iron Curtain was no longer as solid as it had once been, partly due to the increased contact that the CSCE helped establish. Commercial ties expanded and visitors flowed from country to country, increasing the impact of “globalizing influences and integrationist processes.”¹⁴⁷ Politburo members raised concerns about the Reagan administration and American press and television “opening a strong anti-soviet

¹⁴⁵ US Helsinki Watch Committee 1982 Annual Report, 12, Series VIII, Box 1, New York Helsinki Watch Annual Report (1982), Center for Human Rights Documentation and Research, RBML, Columbia University.

¹⁴⁶ Orlov, *Dangerous Thoughts*, 200.

¹⁴⁷ Savranskaya, “Human Rights Movement in the USSR,” 26.

propaganda” regarding Jews in the USSR.¹⁴⁸ Western radio continued to be popular for entertainment and news. The commitments to fostering human contacts, an important point of contention in the debates in drafting the Final Act, turned out to be important in continuing peaceful pressure on the Soviet system after diplomatic contacts grew colder.

Soviet documents suggest that even the shocking January 1980 exile of Andrei Sakharov to the isolated city of Gorky was less to demonstrate Soviet power and insult the West than it was the result of fears regarding his meetings with foreigners, whether Western correspondents and officials or members of the Polish or Czechoslovak opposition. Claiming that 1,200 anti-Soviet radio broadcasts from Western stations were made using materials Sakharov provided, the KGB wanted to prevent him from sending written appeals to the West. They remained concerned that despite his “crimes,” putting Sakharov on trial could entail “grave political complications.” During the time it would take to formally investigate a case and conduct a trial, at least two months, they expected the West “to stir up clamorous anti-Soviet campaigns which would be difficult to counter, because legislation governing procedure in criminal cases prohibits the use of materials from cases under investigation for the purposes of propaganda before the proceedings have been completed.” Instead it seemed expedient to “apply administrative measures in the Sakharov case that would make it possible to halt his contacts with foreigners and to seriously hamper his hostile activity,”

¹⁴⁸ Transcript of CPSU CC Politburo Meeting (excerpt), June 4, 1981, CWIHP, US-Soviet Relations.

including as “a preventive measure his expulsion from Moscow to a part of the country closed to foreigners.” Whether or not the procedural requirements of a trial would have actually hindered propaganda efforts or if this was just a self-serving justification, it appears that the Sakharov exile was not merely punitive or meant to set an example, but was intended to isolate him and stifle his work that harmed the regime.¹⁴⁹ In his new residence the KGB prevented foreigners and “anti-social elements” from meeting him.¹⁵⁰ Soviet leaders understood dissidence as a threat directly related to the Cold War and not just an internal problem.

Elena Bonner came to be a more immediate concern when she served as Sakharov’s messenger from Gorky to contacts with the West. Although her involvement in the circulation of Sakharov’s articles made her liable to criminal punishment, it was deemed inexpedient to immediately launch a criminal case against her, “since it would provide the adversary with additional material for speculating on Sakharov’s persecution.”¹⁵¹ Instead, personal searches would be used to confiscate materials. International concern was not the only factor in Soviet leniency. The KGB noted that allowing Bonner to travel to Italy would be “tactically justified” because it would arouse “surprise and envy on the part of her and Sakharov's accomplices, and this leads to greater discords and hostility within

¹⁴⁹ Andropov and Rudenko to the Central Committee; The case against Andrei Sakharov, December 26, 1979, Yale Annals of Communism, Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 136.

¹⁵⁰ Andropov to the Central Committee; To isolate and harass Sakharov and Bonner, March 11, 1981, Yale Annals of Communism, Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 145.

¹⁵¹ Andropov and Rekunkov to the Central Committee, Contacts between Elena Bonner and the American Embassy, March 31, 1982, Yale Annals of Communism, Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 155.

their milieu.”¹⁵² Whether or not Soviet leaders believed they were acting humanely toward Sakharov and Bonner, increased sensitivity toward Western concerns impacted the way they were treated.

Despite the seeming permanence of the Iron Curtain, gradual changes were set in motion by the CSCE process and the activists who helped establish human rights as a fundamental concern. By disputing the legitimacy of Soviet communism by broadcasting its failures, they were able to undermine the ideological mission of the USSR. Human rights advocacy within the Soviet Union and from abroad prevented the Final Act from being an ideological success for the Soviet Union. While dissidents did not immediately succeed in making major changes to the Soviet system they did form a potential center of opposition that could be expressed when the grip of repression was loosened. Their opportunity would come after a new General Secretary ascended to power in the Soviet Union, and a new era in Soviet domestic and foreign policy began to emerge.

¹⁵² Andropov to the Central Committee; Elena Bonner travels to Italy, December 14, 1978 Yale Annals of Communism, Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 134.

Chapter 3:

Iron Curtain Opens, Iron Fist Loosens, 1985-1989

The succession of Mikhail Gorbachev to General Secretary on March 11, 1985 began a new era in domestic and foreign policy. In a vain attempt to renew the appeal of Soviet socialism through a top-down process of restructuring, the Soviet leadership unleashed social forces that they were unable to harness and soon escaped from their control. Gorbachev hoped to reinvigorate the USSR after a long period of stagnation, which required revitalizing the economy, establishing a political situation that rewarded initiative and competence, and energizing Soviet society. He sought a foreign policy conducive to domestic reform, which required ending the drain of the arms race and reducing the power of the military-industrial complex. Under his leadership the Soviet Union adopted Western human rights norms, and in his advocacy for a common European home Gorbachev referred to Helsinki principles. As Gorbachev and his New Thinking comrades looked west, the principles established in the CSCE process served as admission standards to the European order they hoped to join. The CSCE was an important influence on Soviet reform, which opened the door to an increased dissident effect on foreign and domestic policy.

Curiously, part of the reason for Gorbachev's rise to the top level of power at a comparatively young age was his relationship with Yuri Andropov, the suspicious hardliner who had engineered the crackdown on the dissident

movement. Andropov was originally from the Stavropol region, where Gorbachev lived, and they met regularly during the 1970s while Gorbachev headed the Stavropol Communist Party. Paradoxically, though Andropov was ruthless in cracking down on people he viewed as threats to the Soviet system, he also appeared to believe that corruption and stagnation threatened the system, and instituted mild reforms during his brief period as General Secretary from November 1982 until his death in February 1984.¹⁵³ Anatoly Chernyaev, who became an important Gorbachev aide, recorded that many people in the Soviet leadership had “great expectations for Andropov” for similar reasons they expected Gorbachev would provide competent and energetic leadership. The selection of Chernenko, who was associated with “Brezhnevism” and complacency, to succeed Andropov was a disappointment. Upon Chernenko’s death little more than a year later, Gorbachev’s nomination was met with a massive outburst of applause because “the people [were] tired of stagnation and demonstrations of official stupidity.”¹⁵⁴ Already it appeared likely that change would come to the Soviet system, though even Gorbachev did not know exactly what change would look like.

Change in foreign policy came soon. At first the Soviets continued to act defensively on human rights. The first CSCE meeting entirely devoted to human rights, the Ottawa Meeting of Experts on Human Rights, was held from April 7 to

¹⁵³ Gorbachev was 54 when he was appointed General Secretary. By contrast, Brezhnev was born in 1906, Andropov in 1914, and Chernenko in 1911. Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 25, 47, 49-50.

¹⁵⁴ Anatoly S. Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev* (University Park, PA, 2000), 4-8, 19-21.

June 17, 1985, where the Soviets were the target of Western criticism. Their routine damage control included retorting with human rights shortcomings of critics which often rang hollow or sounded contrived.¹⁵⁵ Gorbachev's July 1985 appointment of Eduard Shevardnadze to replace Andrei Gromyko as Minister of Foreign Affairs marked a new era in foreign policy. Shevardnadze had held a number of positions in the Georgian Communist Party, culminating in his leadership of the Georgian party as First Secretary, but he had little experience in foreign affairs. However, Gorbachev had long trusted him and was eager for a fresh approach to foreign policy.¹⁵⁶ In his memoir, Shevardnadze wrote that he "knew many people in the dissident movement in Georgia quite well" and spoke with them a number of times. He stated that while many of their complaints were beyond his power to change, he managed to keep "hundreds of young people" out of harm's way by having open debates when he could have had people prosecuted.¹⁵⁷ Shevardnadze proved himself to be a capable minister and an adamant reformer.

Shevardnadze considered his primary objective to "create the maximum favorable external conditions needed in order to conduct internal reform."¹⁵⁸ At the time of his appointment it was unclear what reforms were to be made, as the full agenda of perestroika took time to develop. The early focus appeared to be on economic restructuring and acceleration and improved viability and rationality.

¹⁵⁵ Heraclides, *Security and Cooperation in Europe*, 70-71.

¹⁵⁶ Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, 30, 41; Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 280.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, xi.

Helsinki Watch received information on new political trials in 1985, which illustrated to them that human rights policies had not changed under Gorbachev.¹⁵⁹ It was unclear how far Gorbachev thought he would go or how far he really wanted to go. Yet as early as October, Soviet observers sensed a change. Chernayev noted in a diary entry that “in trying to show good intentions to Europe, we are changing too”¹⁶⁰

Gorbachev had been heavily influenced by his experiences abroad and the people he met in his travels. Starting in the late 1960s his party rank enabled him to travel extensively in Europe.¹⁶¹ Some of his most important contacts were with foreign leftists. In June 1984 Gorbachev led the Soviet delegation to the funeral of Italian Communist Party leader Enrico Berlinguer. Gorbachev came away impressed with the PCI, and wanted to establish closer relations. The PCI had been openly sympathetic to the Prague spring, condemned the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, and rejected Moscow domination of the international communist movement.¹⁶² When Gorbachev met in early 1989 with Italian Communist leader Achille Occhetto, he was pressed on Helsinki compliance in the Soviet satellites.¹⁶³ Willy Brandt and Spain’s Socialist Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez helped Gorbachev develop his views of socialism with a democratic direction. But it was not only the political left that influenced Gorbachev. He would refer to his

¹⁵⁹ Annual Report 1985, 20. Series VIII, Box 1, Helsinki Watch Annual Report (1985), Center for Human Rights Documentation and Research, RBML, Columbia University.

¹⁶⁰ Oct 7, 1985 diary entry excerpted in Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 40.

¹⁶¹ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 369.

¹⁶² Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 75.

¹⁶³ Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Achille Occhetto, February 28, 1989, *Masterpieces of History*, 408.

December 1984 trip to Great Britain as “eye-opening” and the beginning of a “good personal relationship” with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.¹⁶⁴

Importantly, he would also come to have good personal relations with Ronald Reagan.

Gorbachev also looked for advice from Soviet officials who understood the world abroad. For example, in the 1970s Alexander Yakovlev fell out of favor among Brezhnev’s circle and took the post of Soviet ambassador to Canada as a kind of political exile. Gorbachev met him on a trip abroad and in 1983 Gorbachev had Yakovlev appointed to director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) research organization.¹⁶⁵ Yakovlev would serve as an important adviser and partisan of the perestroika reform program. Another important reformer among Gorbachev’s advisors was Anatoly Chernyaev, a foreign policy expert who among other duties had written some speeches for Brezhnev. Gorbachev selected him as an aide in February 1986 and he would become one of Gorbachev’s closest advisors.¹⁶⁶ It should also be noted that Gorbachev was accompanied by his wife Raisa on all his foreign trips starting in 1984, and the two of them discussed everything.¹⁶⁷ Gorbachev’s experiences, relations, and leadership style led him to greater understanding of the opinions, expectations, and reality of the world beyond the Iron Curtain.

¹⁶⁴ Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 116, 77.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁶⁶ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 49; Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 214.

¹⁶⁷ Raisa had been a teacher and innovative sociologist in Stavropol province. Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 34-35.

In 1986 changes in the Soviet Union's approach to human rights became more apparent. Already during the Bern CSCE Meeting of Experts on Human Contacts, held in April and May, a more positive Soviet attitude was noticed.¹⁶⁸ Gorbachev met with US Congressmen Fascell and Broomfield on April 4, where they discussed the Afghanistan war and human rights and "set the stage for future dialogue" between the superpowers. Chernyaev believed this meeting hardened Gorbachev's "already existing resolve to end 'the Sakharov affair.'"¹⁶⁹ When American conditions to hold the Reykjavik summit included the release of 25 prisoners, the Soviet response, developed at a September 1986 politburo meeting was to institute incremental releases, including Orlov one month later. Yet the Soviets also rhetorically attacked the US administration as saboteurs of peacemaking efforts and criticized America "on the usual grounds: the homeless, crime on the streets, unemployment, racism, violating human rights in the Third World, etc."¹⁷⁰ Gorbachev wanted to take the initiative in foreign policy and prevent a perception that events were being driven by the United States. Soviet moves in 1986 met with cautious optimism from Helsinki Watch, which noted that "In 1986, as Mr. Gorbachev consolidated his power, the situation began to change." The USSR had demonstrated "increased flexibility" in the field of human rights.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Heraclides, *Security and Cooperation in Europe*, 75.

¹⁶⁹ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 58.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁷¹ Annual Report 1986, Series VIII, Box 1, Helsinki Watch Annual Report, (1987), Center for Human Rights Documentation and Research, RBML, Columbia University, 3-4.

A new human rights regime, along with big strides in disarmament efforts, breathed new life into Soviet diplomacy and also served as part of an effort to recharge domestic excitement for the Soviet system that had waned during the period of stagnation. Shevardnadze surprised George Shultz by taking the initiative on human rights in discussions. Previously the topic of human rights “had been the American’s favorite hobbyhorse, and a taboo for us.”¹⁷² Gorbachev found it desirable to take ideological initiative for the USSR and undercut Western hard-liners. In Politburo discussions Gorbachev emphasized the need to make the Soviet Union attractive. “We need to work out a conception on human rights, both at home and abroad.” It was necessary to put an end to the routine because it “only produces dissidents.” In October 1986 he directed the Politburo to “see what we can do” on human rights. “We need to open a way back to the Soviet Union for thousands of emigrants, to move this current in the opposite direction.”¹⁷³

The desire to increase enthusiasm for the Soviet Union at home and abroad was a major factor when Soviet leaders weighed the costs and benefits of releasing Sakharov and Bonner from exile. Gorbachev and Yakovlev believed that neither the democratization of the country nor normal relations with the outside world would be possible while Sakharov remained in exile, but they needed to act delicately to not upset party conservatives or give the KGB an opportunity to block the move. On December 16 Gorbachev telephoned Sakharov

¹⁷² Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, 85.

¹⁷³ Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 237-238.

to personally inform him and his wife that their internal exile ended.¹⁷⁴ They expected that the couple would again engage in opposition activity but despite the possible consequences, “Sakharov's return to Moscow will entail fewer political costs than his continued isolation in Gorky.”¹⁷⁵ For the new Soviet leadership now ready to make big changes, isolating Sakharov was a bigger obstacle to their goals than allowing Sakharov to be politically active and free to meet foreigners in Moscow.

The effect of the dissident movement and Helsinki activism on the initiation of reform is hard to judge. A Moscow human rights activist summed up the situation in 1984 as, “the movement never became a mass movement and the immediate demands of the dissidents were almost wholly frustrated.”¹⁷⁶ However, dissident voices were widely known through underground publications and Western radio broadcasts. Chernayev believed “Gorbachev’s preparation for a break with the primitive, falsified, official Party version of Soviet history” was his serious reading of samizdat (unsanctioned self-published works) and tamizdat (works published abroad), as well as restricted Progress publications for the elite.¹⁷⁷ Sakharov’s early samizdat essay *Progress, Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom* was widely read and discussed among reformist thinkers.¹⁷⁸ It is difficult to evaluate the effect that dissident publications had on future reformers, as

¹⁷⁴ Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 165.

¹⁷⁵ Shevardnadze, Chebrikov, Yakovlev, and Dobrynin to the Central Committee; How to exploit Sakharov’s return to Moscow, January 15, 1987, Yale Annals of Communism, Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 191.

¹⁷⁶ Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, 46.

¹⁷⁷ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 138.

¹⁷⁸ Robert D. English in introduction to Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, xx.

opposed to their own experiences trying to get anything useful done in the Soviet system. Tracing influences is not a straightforward process when there are so many factors involved and much of the source material consists of subjective statements with potential to be self-serving. However, in light of their wide audience it is likely that dissidents had some effect on the way reformers understood the nature of the problem.

It is easier to see the effect of dissidents after Gorbachev opened the gates in 1985 and 1986. Social forces released in Gorbachev's efforts to invigorate Soviet society, spurred on by the Chernobyl disaster as well as by Gorbachev's increasing confidence, were influenced by dissidents who would again become active, this time as participants in a broader reform movement.¹⁷⁹ The KGB, who continued to monitor Sakharov and Bonner, noted that the troublesome couple was becoming active in newly emerging civil society organizations, including the Moscow Tribune, a political science study group, and Memorial, which commemorated the victims of Stalinism and encouraged further democratization of the Soviet system. A participant in Memorial's founding believed the group should be the heir of the Helsinki Watch Group and actively defend human rights in the USSR and abroad.¹⁸⁰ The KGB was alarmed in 1989 that a mining strike committee was distributing information about Sakharov's support for the strike.

¹⁷⁹ Shevardnadze, who blamed a mentality of secrecy within old guard for making the disaster worse, says that Chernobyl "tore the blindfold from our eyes and persuaded us that politics and morals could not diverge." Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, 175-176.

¹⁸⁰ Kryuchkov to the Central Committee; The establishment of Moscow Tribune, October 15, 1988 Yale Annals of Communism, Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 194.
Kryuchkov to the Central Committee; The establishment of Memorial, November 16, 1988 Yale Annals of Communism, Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 195.

“Great significance is attached to his endorsement of the political demands submitted by the miners, as well as of the decisiveness and purposefulness of their actions.”¹⁸¹ In addition, Boris Yeltsin’s removal from Communist Party leadership in late 1987 started a process that would bring him into contact with former dissidents and other radicals.¹⁸²

The dissident effect was prominent in the 1989 Congress of People’s Deputies, elected in the first truly competitive elections in Soviet history. Televised sessions were seen by an estimated 200 million people.¹⁸³ Sakharov was an active, outspoken member of the Congress, and garnered much support.¹⁸⁴ The presence of a leading dissident, who had for years been a symbol of conscience rallying the West, as a prominent member of the Soviet Union’s first elected government body with any power, heralded a major change in the human rights situation. Yuri Orlov, certainly not a neutral observer, held that dissidents provided the moral example to the “fourth Russian Revolution” that was underway.¹⁸⁵ When Sakharov died in December 1989, his memorial service might not have brought out the massive numbers of supporters that democrats hoped for,

¹⁸¹ Kryuchkov to Gorbachev; Sakharov's influence on the labor movement in the Vorkuta mining region, November 14, 1989, Yale Annals of Communism, Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 197.

¹⁸² Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 110, 118.

¹⁸³ Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, 95.

¹⁸⁴ Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 191.

¹⁸⁵ Orlov, *Dangerous Thoughts* 323. Orlov also maintains that Gorbachev sought minor reforms in response to massive economic problems, but after “twenty-five years of secretly reading and discussing the ideas of Sakharov, Solzhenitsyn, and the dissidents, Soviet citizens began to emerge from their samizdat-filled kitchens” and gradually pushed the boundaries of glasnost “toward the dissidents’ conception of it: freedom of expression in the Western sense, a fundamental human right.” *Ibid*, 315.

but it was still attended by tens of thousands of people.¹⁸⁶ Considering the dismal showing that sitting Communist party officials made when up for popular election, the dissidents' lack of association with the current system may have gained them popular legitimacy and credibility as outsiders.¹⁸⁷ While, like most Soviet citizens they lacked experience in politics, they came to the era of perestroika and glasnost already having a developed message of further democratization, and they had networks of associates with experience working together and organizing. Earlier manifestos and movements could be handy in crafting alternatives that were needed as reforms bogged down.

Dissidents also had an effect on Western diplomacy throughout the era of Gorbachev's reforms. In the spring of 1986, three months after his release from a Soviet labor camp into exile abroad, Anatoly Shcharansky toured the United States. When speaking to Jewish organizations, the Reagan administration, and Congress, he advocated a strategy of using both public and quiet diplomacy to defend human rights and the Jewish community in the Soviet Union.¹⁸⁸ When Elena Bonner travelled to the West in early 1986 she participated in press conferences, panels, and meetings with foreign leaders. Bonner and Shcharansky urged American officials to continue using the Helsinki process to discuss human

¹⁸⁶ Kryuchkov to the Central Committee; More on the funeral of Andrei Sakharov. December 20, 1989, Yale Annals of Communism, Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 202.

¹⁸⁷ Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, 76.

¹⁸⁸ Shcharansky settled in Israel with his wife Avital, who had constantly advocated for his release since she was allowed to leave the USSR in 1974. He Hebraized his first name to Natan. (Beckerman, 483, 502-503).

rights questions and defend human rights.¹⁸⁹ Orlov also had an influence on Western diplomacy. He had a discussion with Reagan and Shultz shortly before the Reykjavik summit and travelled to the Vienna CSCE follow-up meeting with Catherine Fitzpatrick from Helsinki Watch. The position he took on a Soviet proposal to hold a human rights meeting in Moscow was that the West should agree to attend with strong conditions, which is the course that the West would take.¹⁹⁰ While dissidents were not driving policy either at superpower summits or at CSCE gatherings, they were sought for advice on upholding human rights.

The third CSCE follow-up meeting, which was held in Vienna from November 4, 1986, to January 19, 1989, formed the backdrop for much of this period. The Vienna conference not only measured the Soviet Union's improvement in human rights but became a driving force in Soviet reforms. The conference began inauspiciously. Anatoly Marchenko, a Soviet dissident who had recently written to CSCE delegates about human rights abuses in the Soviet Union, died in prison shortly after the conference began. Then, Shevardnadze shocked the attendees by proposing a human rights conference in Moscow in his opening statement.¹⁹¹ The proposal was officially submitted a month later, and the Soviet delegation was vague as to what the goals of the conference would be. A year of unproductive debate ensued as Western delegations heavily criticized the

¹⁸⁹ Chebrikov to the Central Committee; Bonner in the West; Sakharov on the Chernobyl accident, June 18, 1986, Yale Annals of Communism, Andrei Sakharov KGB File, Doc 189.

¹⁹⁰ Orlov, *Dangerous Thoughts*, 300-301, 304-305.

¹⁹¹ Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*, 175-177.

USSR.¹⁹² Shevardnadze writes that he “was convinced that the conference was essential in order to show the world how far we intended to go and, beyond that, to provide an impetus for democratization and the perestroika of legislation in everything related to human affairs.” Not surprisingly many of his Politburo colleagues had difficulty accepting his argument that signing the Final act meant assuming obligations and acknowledging the right of other signatories to review their compliance, and “stormy debates” ensued.¹⁹³ Whether or not Shevardnadze is revealing all of the motivations and this wasn’t another example of diplomacy as a tactical maneuver against the class enemy, the proposal remained and served as a commitment to holding a meeting so long as the West would accept, which they would only do if the Soviets demonstrated concrete improvements.

As the Vienna conference went on, the Soviets gradually showed better human rights observance as Gorbachev cautiously advanced his reform program. Snyder writes that “for many observers, progress on the proposed Moscow conference served as a barometer of Eastern advancement on human rights” since the formal conference proposal, and thus agreement on a concluding document was conditioned on Soviet progress in human rights.¹⁹⁴ The CSCE came to serve as an international body reviewing the progress of perestroika and measuring reform. The Soviets began to hold more meetings with the press, to accept lists of refuseniks and political prisoners, and to meet with NGOs and activists. Though part of the changed behavior was likely a cynical attempt to show cosmetic

¹⁹² Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*, 183; Heraclides, *Security and Cooperation in Europe*, 85.

¹⁹³ Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, 86.

¹⁹⁴ Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*, 178.

changes, the Soviets demonstrated increased sensitivity to human rights concerns, and they would be continually pressed for improvement. In 1987 the USSR took meaningful steps including releasing some political prisoners, acting on family reunification cases, and curbing radio jamming. They also responded for the first time to the US Congressional Helsinki Commission, resolving 137 of the 442 cases the commission presented, and even began responding to Helsinki Watch.¹⁹⁵ Jeri Laber, chair of Helsinki Watch, celebrated that “Reforms we had demanded as conditions for the Moscow human rights conference...had actually come to pass.”¹⁹⁶

The Vienna conference closed on January 19, 1989, with the West agreeing to meet in Moscow after first holding conferences on the human dimension in Paris and Copenhagen. The West had held the Soviets to their word. The USSR released numerous political prisoners and issued exit visas with much less restriction. Afterward Gorbachev showed a greater commitment to human rights than external pressure required.¹⁹⁷ The Paris Conference on the Human Dimension, from May 30 to June 23, 1989 was “characterized by a good atmosphere, with very limited conflict among East-West lines.”¹⁹⁸ Human rights moved from an element of East-West confrontation to a more collaborative endeavor.

¹⁹⁵ Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*, 182-184, 191, 195.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 215.

¹⁹⁸ Heraclides, *Security and Cooperation in Europe*, 110.

By 1989, the Soviet human rights situation had drastically improved, partly due to foreign pressure. Chernyaev remarked, “Paradoxical as it may seem, efforts toward disarmament and new relations with the West – originally meant ‘to create favorable external conditions for perestroika’ – in fact became its locomotive” as contacts with Western Europe impacted the democratization process.¹⁹⁹ Reformers sometimes found foreign pressure useful. One Gorbachev aide remarked that “Gorbachev’s team, which was pushing for internal reforms, in particular in the area of emigration policy, used US requests in the humanitarian field as a lever in our internal debates.”²⁰⁰ Helsinki Watch reports on the Soviet Union adopted an increasingly hopeful tone, especially in contrast to the dismal feeling of the early 1980s. By 1989 a sense of triumphalism is apparent, combined with reminders of the need for continued monitoring including “in the Soviet Union, where problems persist.” Soviet reforms were described as contradictory, hesitant, and shuffling.²⁰¹

When Gorbachev invoked the “idea of the common European home” in his July 1989 speech to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, he praised the Helsinki process. He characterized Europe as paying its debts to humankind for colonialism and world war by pressing for changes in international relations in the spirit of humanism, equality, and justice, and by setting an example of democracy

¹⁹⁹ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 144.

²⁰⁰ Adamishin (Gorbachev aide) in Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*, 197.

²⁰¹ Annual Report 1989, 25, Series VIII, Box 1, Helsinki Watch Annual Report (1989), Center for Human Rights Documentation and Research, RBML, Columbia University.

and social achievements.²⁰² Gorbachev credited the Helsinki process with initiating this “immense effort of world significance.” He pronounced a position on human rights in international diplomacy that was nearly the complete opposite from that of Brezhnev.

“A world in which military arsenals would be cut but in which human rights would be violated cannot feel secure. We, for our part, have arrived at this conclusion finally and irrevocably.”²⁰³

Gorbachev hailed the Vienna conference as “a genuine breakthrough.” Gorbachev’s presentation of human rights did not conflict with his socialist ideals, and importantly, CSCE terminology accommodated an approach that could be characterized as universal and humanitarian instead of Western and capitalist. Soviet human rights policy had shifted into a non-confrontational, cooperative framework by acknowledging the legitimacy of the role of human rights in diplomacy and international security.

The CSCE process figures large among foreign influences on Soviet human rights improvement. A meeting of Warsaw Pact representatives in the summer of 1989 paid special attention to the process of building a “pan-European home” while analyzing the results of the recent CSCE meetings. Emphasis was placed “on the interests and values common for the European peoples, on the need

²⁰² Address by Mikhail Gorbachev to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, July 6, 1989, *Masterpieces of History*, 493.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 495.

for equal dialogue and an enhancement of contacts in various areas.”²⁰⁴

Shevardnadze characterized Soviet foreign policy as having “graduated from the ‘academy of Europe,’ the school of the Helsinki process.”²⁰⁵ Heraclides is cautious to avoid making firm judgment on the effect of Helsinki. He notes that many public pronouncements should be treated with caution, for they are at least partly self-serving: “Participants are expected to praise the CSCE in a CSCE meeting, and a CSCE document is bound to praise the process.” Nonetheless he considers it “reasonable” for the CSCE to take some credit, and “without doubt it provided a framework on which to build a new pan-European regime when the time came in 1989-90.”²⁰⁶

The increased trust that was fostered by responsiveness in human rights issues helped end the East-West confrontation. Gorbachev’s “anti-Fulton” address to the United Nations in December 1988 not only declared a unilateral withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe and massive reductions in armed forces, but also promised to expand participation in human rights monitoring of the UN and CSCE and pledged to end arrests for political purposes. The speech met with massive applause and prompted Shultz to remark that Gorbachev had declared the Cold War over.²⁰⁷ The place of human rights in the easing of superpower tensions is indicated by a February 1989 cable by US Ambassador to the Soviet Union

²⁰⁴ Memorandum from Foreign Minister Petar Mladenov to the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, July 12, 1989, CWIHP, US-Soviet Relations.

²⁰⁵ Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, 164.

²⁰⁶ Heraclides, *Security and Cooperation in Europe*, 174.

²⁰⁷ “Anti-Fulton” or “Fulton in reverse” is a reference to Winston Churchill’s famous “Iron Curtain” speech, which he delivered in Fulton, Missouri. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*, 209-210.

Jack Matlock. He underscored that the most central US interest remained “the long-term transformation of the Soviet Union into a society with effective organic constraints on the use of military force outside its borders.” Human rights “must of course remain a key element in US policy” but many human rights issues could now be approached “under the rubric of ‘cooperation’ rather than confrontation.”²⁰⁸ Yet disagreement in the US intelligence community remained about Soviet sincerity and the permanence of Soviet policy changes. A 1989 National Intelligence Estimate highlighted these disagreements and emphasized that “for the foreseeable future, the USSR will remain the West’s principle adversary.”²⁰⁹ Nevertheless, relations improved. CSCE Negotiations after 1989 onwards were “no longer bloc-to-bloc.” Central and East Europe states under new non-communist leadership became protagonists in the human dimension.²¹⁰ Problems did persist in the Soviet Union. The country had yet to fully reach Helsinki standards, the military and KGB were sometimes operating behind the back of political leadership, and a humanitarian crisis loomed.²¹¹ Nevertheless, by the end of 1989 the USSR had made substantial progress in upholding human rights and its foreign policy had made human rights no longer a point of competition, but instead in item of cooperation.

²⁰⁸ Cable from Jack Matlock to State Department, “US-Soviet Relations: Policy Opportunities,” February 27, 1989, *Masterpieces of History* 399, 402.

²⁰⁹ National Intelligence Estimate 11-4-89, “Soviet Policy toward the West: The Gorbachev Challenge” April 11, 1989 *Masterpieces of History*, 442.

²¹⁰ Heraclides, *Security and Cooperation in Europe*, 133.

²¹¹ At the 1990 International Helsinki Federation meeting in Moscow, “All the reports, especially from the Soviet provinces, painted a detailed picture of unspeakable destruction affecting millions.” Orlov, *Dangerous Thoughts*, 324.

Conclusion:

One Important Factor

The CSCE process, including contributions from dissidents, diplomats, politicians, and activists, had a direct influence on facilitating change in the Soviet Union, and in fostering the East-West trust and reconciliation that was crucial for ending the Cold War. It was a gradual process and perhaps not the most important factor, but the Helsinki process helped establish human rights advocacy as a more prominent feature of the East-West divide, a part that opened itself to the participation of private groups and individuals. From high level diplomacy and also from below, pressure mounted on the Soviet leadership that finally found traction when the system was opened to reform and reconciliation.

Because human rights cooperation took place concurrently with the end of Cold War confrontation, it should be considered whether human rights advocacy was a driving force in ending the Cold War or whether the thawing of the Cold War, with an easing of the arms race and decreasing mistrust, expansionism, and ideological hostility made cooperation on human rights possible. The answer is not clear. Progress in the Soviet Union's human rights practices was one factor in gaining Western trust, but not the only one. The increase in East-West trust that made an end to the Cold War confrontation more achievable also made further cooperation on human rights more achievable. The human rights contest was one aspect of the East-West conflict, a contest of broader ideological and geopolitical

concerns. This means that the human rights contest between the Soviet authorities and their adversaries was shaped by the Cold War context it operated in. It also means that the convergence of human rights values spelled the end of one important aspect of the Cold War, helping to bring about conditions needed to end other aspects. Perhaps crucially for the ideologues, Helsinki norms could be presented as universal and humanitarian instead of Western and capitalist.

After 1989 the USSR would face the challenges of upholding human rights as the nation disintegrated and top leaders conspired to uphold their own interest, while the satellite republics would face the challenges of emerging as truly independent and democratic states in a chaotic international environment. Tensions remained between the Soviet Union and the West, but improvement in human rights had become largely a cooperative endeavor between domestic and foreign rivals. A study of developing human rights norms in the satellite states might look similar as they tended to take the Moscow line on human rights until Gorbachev changed too much, and human rights advocates were suppressed until the great transitions of 1989.

But the Soviets made undeniable progress. By 1989 the Soviet Union was at the center of major changes in internal and international human rights policy. Soviet leaders released political prisoners and legalized public gatherings and organizations not sanctioned by the Party. The conclusion of the Vienna Conference and Gorbachev's embracing of Helsinki principles at Strasbourg meant the integration of the USSR into a new pan-European human rights regime.

When dissidents became prominent actors in Soviet government and civil society a major shift had been marked.

Perhaps the Helsinki network deserves a place as one of the periodic, quickly crushed rebellions against Soviet power. If so, it was similar to the rebellions of the Prague Spring and Solidarity in that its partisans would ultimately come back to haunt the regime. The CSCE certainly deserves credit as a primary motor of the human rights component to the East-West confrontation and reconciliation. It was also an influence in pushing the Soviet Union towards political reform, and deserves a place among other factors in Soviet reform such as economic trouble, generational change within the intelligentsia, and the Chernobyl disaster. In order to step out from behind the Iron Curtain the Soviet Union had to adopt the human rights standards that the West fought to include in the Helsinki Final Act.

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