

The 1976 Presidential Campaign and “The Ultimate Polish Joke”

Brian Trenor

NC State University

Although President Gerald Ford's assertion that "there is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe" was certainly the most dramatic moment of the 1976 second presidential debate, Poland had barely been mentioned in the campaign until that moment. Candidate Jimmy Carter's rhetoric concerning Eastern Europe had been vague and unfocused. In the weeks following the second debate, however, the Carter team fleshed out its Eastern Europe policy with the ready help of Carter's key foreign policy advisor, Polish-born Zbigniew Brzezinski. This essay examines the evolution of Carter's policy toward Poland, which Carter first fully articulated at a Pulaski Day dinner in Chicago on October 10, 1976. In a dramatic change in policy, Carter stressed human rights, Radio Free Europe, cultural and economic exchanges, and a bilateral relationship with Poland that treated it as a semi-independent power. This four-fold policy would not only sharpen the distinctions between Carter and Ford, but also later provide the foundation of Carter's policy toward Poland when he was president.¹

Ford's policy focused on Eastern Europe as a region, and paid relatively little attention to the individual countries such as Poland. It was mediated through Moscow, and US-Soviet relations were overriding of any other concerns toward Eastern Europe. Nixon and Ford had dealt with Eastern Europe primarily in an economic sense, as Raymond Garthoff explains: "improved terms for trade and economic relations were seen as the principal incentive the U.S. government could provide the countries of Eastern Europe." Moscow saw this trend positively,

¹ This article is based on research for my MA thesis, which focuses on U.S. policy toward Poland during the Carter years. While I have relied on archival sources from the Carter Library, online databases and the speeches published in the five volume campaign history: U.S. Congress, *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), the following secondary sources have been helpful to provide context: Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, (Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 1994); Patrick G. Vaughan, "Zbigniew Brzezinski and the Helsinki Final Act," in Leopold Nuti, *The crisis of détente in Europe: from Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985*, (New York: Routledge, 2009); Patrick Vaughan, "Beyond Benign Neglect: Zbigniew Brzezinski and the Polish Crisis of 1980," *The Polish Review*, Vol. 64, No. 1, 1999; Leo Ribuffo, "Is Poland a Soviet Satellite? Gerald Ford, the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine, and the Election of 1976," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (July 1990).

as it relaxed its own economic troubles. By the mid 1970s the United States had all but abandoned the desire of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations to seek a “liberalizing” influence in Eastern Europe policy; priorities like MBFN, CSCE, and SALT became more imminent and important, and Soviet cooperation was necessary to achieve these ends. In 1975, the major powers signed the Helsinki Final Act, which contained three sections, or “baskets:” Basket One accepted the current division of Europe and the inviolability of borders, Basket Two called for economic cooperation between the communist and capitalist camps, and Basket Three called for the protection of human rights, including the right to emigration, speech, and thought. Most observers, including the White House, State Department, and the Kremlin, paid little heed to the human rights portions. In such a light, Radio Free Europe broadcasts or White House receptions of dissidents like Solzhenitsyn became liabilities. Congress kept RFE’s budget static, and dissidents, much to their dismay, found turned backs in Washington. Because Baskets One and Two contained virtually every condition they had desired, the Soviet Union considered the Accords a diplomatic triumph. Still, Helsinki was a watershed moment for the dissident movement, which would begin to form watch groups to monitor violations of the human rights provisions. Over time, some in the United States would also come to see the Helsinki Accords as a means through which to indirectly contest the continued division of Europe.²

The most famous formulation of policy on Eastern Europe during the Ford years was the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine. The doctrine viewed the division of Europe into East and West as an unfortunate fact of life. Given this, nationalist uprisings by Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, and other East Europeans were seen as destabilizing, and therefore the United States should not encourage dissidents. Instead, a more “organic” relationship between the Warsaw Pact states and Moscow

² Ford, on Kissinger’s advice, declined to receive Solzhenitsyn when he visited Washington D.C. in the summer of 1975; Ribuffo pg. 389-394; Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and confrontation: American-Soviet relations from Nixon to Reagan*, (Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 1994), pg. 550.

would create more stability. Sonnenfeldt recognized this would expose the United States to the charge that it was complicit in “helping the Soviets maintain their control over Eastern Europe,” but he argued there was no alternative if the United States wanted a stable Europe. The East Europeans would have to overcome their “romantic inclinations” to “break out of the Soviet straitjacket.”³

This was explosive stuff never intended to be made public, but it was leaked in March 1976 to the investigative journalists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak and immediately went viral. The Sonnenfeldt Doctrine together with the Helsinki Accords made the topic of Eastern Europe immeasurably more controversial. What role should the United States have in the region? Most commentators had an opinion on the subject, usually a very strong one. Even Radio Warsaw found the doctrine alarming, lamenting the perceived *quid pro quo* of, “We have written off Eastern Europe; you should now write off Western Europe.” Brzezinski later noted in an interview, “It did reflect this notion of condominium...let’s settle for what we can.” Brzezinski had opposed such a viewpoint for much of his career; while at Columbia University, he had written speeches for the Kennedy Administration urging “peaceful engagement” toward Eastern Europe in order to slowly wean it from the Soviet empire through, among other means, cultural contact and the radio services.⁴ This would greatly inform Brzezinski’s advice to Carter, which would in turn spur an important shift in the candidate’s thinking.

Prior to the debates, Brzezinski advised Carter to refrain from criticizing the Helsinki

³ “Sonnenfeldt Doctrine; Discussion at Chiefs of Mission Conference on U.S. Policy in Eastern Europe, December 13-14, 1975,” [Digital National Security Archives](#), Kissinger Transcripts, Item KTO1850, pg. 47-69.

⁴ Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), pg. 664-665; Robert Novak, *The Prince of Darkness: 50 Years of Reporting in Washington*, (New York: Random House, 2008), pg. 277; Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet bloc, unity and conflict*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), pg. 265-266; Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, in Patrick Vaughan, “Zbigniew Brzezinski: The Political And Academic Life of a Cold War Visionary,” dissertation, West Virginia University, 2003, pg. 245; Ribuffo, pg. 387; Paul A. Kubricht, "Politics and Foreign Policy: A Brief Look at the Kennedy Administration's Eastern European Diplomacy." *Diplomatic History* 11, no.1 (Winter 1987).

Accords as a whole and call instead for Soviet compliance with the Basket Three provisions of Helsinki, which for the first time gave the United States the right “to insist on respect for human rights without this constituting interference in the internal affairs of communist states.

Accordingly, this is a considerable asset for us, and you should hammer away at the proposition that the Republicans have been indifferent to this opportunity.”⁵ Carter had initially criticized the Helsinki Accords, but by 1976 he agreed with Brzezinski’s line of thinking. Carter and Brzezinski were not insincere in their thinking, and genuinely believed their approach was in the national interest. At the same time, they were not opposed to seizing a political opportunity to hammer their rival. This allowed Carter to “seize the optimistic vision” from Ford, casting himself as “a man of the future” and a champion of American values abroad.⁶

This trend would be exploited most effectively at the second presidential debate, held in San Francisco on October 6, 1976. Whereas the first debate had focused exclusively on domestic policy, the second would turn to foreign affairs. The stakes for both sides were high. Carter’s lead was slipping. He had held a thirty-three point lead in the Gallup polls following the Democratic Convention in July, but as the second debate drew near the race had narrowed to a statistical dead heat.⁷

Brzezinski and Carter sat down to breakfast the morning of October 5 to prepare for the debate the next day. Carter, aware of his evaporating lead, “was not in a good mood.” According

⁵ Elizabeth Drew, “Human Rights,” *The New Yorker*, July 18, 1977, pg. 36; Patrick Vaughan, “Beyond Benign Neglect: Zbigniew Brzezinski and the Polish Crisis of 1980,” *The Polish Review*, Vol. 64, No. 1, 1999, pg. 6; Vaughan, “Helsinki Final Act,” pg. 14-15.

⁶ “East European Reactions to Sonnenfeldt,” [Radio Free Europe/Open Society Archives](http://files.osa.ceu.hu/holdings/300/8/3/text/99-6-83.shtml), Box-Folder-Report 99-6-83, pg. 7, <http://files.osa.ceu.hu/holdings/300/8/3/text/99-6-83.shtml>; Norman Friedman, *The Fifty-Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2007), pg. 414; Ribuffo pg. 394; Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, in Patrick Vaughan, “Zbigniew Brzezinski: The Political And Academic Life of a Cold War Visionary,” dissertation, West Virginia University, 2003, pg. 245.

⁷ Patrick G. Vaughan, “Zbigniew Brzezinski and the Helsinki Final Act,” in Leopold Nuti, *The crisis of détente in Europe: from Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), pg. 11; Jeffery Jones, “Gerald Ford Retrospective,” December 29, 2006, [Gallup](http://www.gallup.com/poll/23995/Gerald-Ford-Retrospective.aspx#1), <http://www.gallup.com/poll/23995/Gerald-Ford-Retrospective.aspx#1>; “The Race: Stay Tuned,” *Newsweek*, October 4, 1976.

to according to historian Patrick Vaughan, who has had access to Zbigniew Brzezinski's private papers, Brzezinski was Carter's only advisor for the debate. By then, he had clearly become Carter's key foreign policy aide; all the other advisers were told to "clear it with Zbig." Zbigniew Brzezinski's hand can be detected behind many of Carter's speeches.⁸ Brzezinski urged the Democratic candidate to argue "that the major issue confronting us is the absence of effective Presidential leadership." By putting Ford on the defensive Carter could neutralize the advantage of incumbency. By charging Ford had let the Soviets get the best of détente by had neglected human rights, Carter would assault "Kissinger's worldview from both conservative and liberal angles."⁹

This preparation would pay major dividends when, about halfway through the debate, journalist Max Frankel asked President Ford whether detente was allowing the Soviets to get "the better of us." Defending the Helsinki accords, Ford boldly asserted, "There is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, and there never will be under a Ford Administration." Pressed for clarification, Ford kept digging, claiming he didn't believe that the Yugoslavs, Romanians, and Poles "consider themselves dominated by the Soviet Union." Sensing an opportunity, Carter leapt to the attack, charging:

[Helsinki] may have been a good agreement in the beginning, but we have failed to enforce the so-called Basket 3 part... The Soviet Union is still jamming Radio Free Europe... We've also seen a very serious problem with the so-called Sonnenfeldt document which, apparently, Mr. Ford has just endorsed, which said that there is an organic linkage between the Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union. And I would like to see Mr. Ford convince the Polish-Americans and the Czech-Americans and

⁸ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), pg. 5-9; Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet bloc, unity and conflict*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), pg. 265-266; Vaughan, "Helsinki Final Act," pg. 11-15; Patrick Vaughan, "Zbigniew Brzezinski and Afghanistan," in Anna Kasten Nelson, *The policy makers: shaping American foreign policy from 1947 to the present*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), pg. 115; David S. Foglesong, *The American mission and the "Evil Empire": the crusade for a "Free Russia" since 1881*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pg. 148; Kaplan, pg. 162-165.

⁹ Vaughan, "Political and Academic Life," pg. 239, 263; Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), pg. 699.

the Hungarian-Americans in this country that those countries don't live under the domination and supervision of the Soviet Union behind the Iron Curtain.¹⁰

Carter had hammered Ford's entire Eastern Europe policy point-by-point. He had also emphasized the themes of his campaign: unlike President Ford, he would never engage in secret diplomacy and would always stand up to the Soviets. James Naughton of the *New York Times* reported an "audible intake of air" from the crowd; Ford's policy advisor Brent Scowcroft, watching the debate backstage, was said to have "gone white." Carter's strategist Hamilton Jordan exclaimed "He did it! Jimmy cleaned his clock!" No less than William F. Buckley Jr. called Ford's answer "the ultimate Polish joke." For several more days, Ford would try to backtrack before finally acknowledging his mistake. Suddenly Eastern Europe had jumped to the forefront of campaign topics.¹¹

Brzezinski did not want to "overplay the subject," writing in a memo to campaign staff that Carter should remind audiences "that already back in March Carter addressed himself to the question of Eastern Europe, and warned of the Soviet threat to Yugoslavia, Rumania, Poland, etc." By reiterating the language of the earlier speech, Carter "would show that he is not merely exploiting Ford's mistake but speaking out of conviction."¹² In the following weeks, the Carter team worked to sharpen their rhetoric on Eastern Europe, hammering home on the importance of Helsinki compliance and addressing the problems of individual nations, especially Poland.

On October 10, four days after the debate, Jimmy Carter attended a Pulaski Day dinner

¹⁰ *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume 3, pg. 100; Ribuffo, pg. 385.

¹¹ Ribuffo, pg. 386-399; Vaughan, "Helsinki Final Act," pg. 15; Mark Rozell, *The Press and the Ford Presidency*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992); William F. Buckley, Jr., "Mr. Ford's Polish Joke," *National Review*, November 12, 1976, (Vol. 28 Issue 43), pg. 1252; Rudy Abramson, "President Defends Dominance Remark," *Los Angeles Times*, October 8, 1976, pg. A1; David Shipler, "Poland Is Definitely a Soviet-Style Autonomy," *New York Times*, October 10, 1976, pg. 177; Seth King, "Ethnic Groups Score Ford's Views on Soviet Role in Eastern Europe," *The New York Times*, October 8, 1976.

¹² Campaign Memo from Brzezinski to Carter staffers – October 8, 1976, "Items to Bear in Mind Regarding Eastern Europe," personal archives of Zbigniew Brzezinski, cited in, Vaughan, "Political and Academic Life," pg. 267; Jeffery Jones, "Gerald Ford Retrospective," December 29, 2006, [Gallup](http://www.gallup.com/poll/23995/Gerald-Ford-Retrospective.aspx#1), <http://www.gallup.com/poll/23995/Gerald-Ford-Retrospective.aspx#1>; "The Blooper Heard Round the World," *Time*, October 18, 1978.

held by the Polish community in Chicago. Following Brzezinski's playbook, Carter reminded the crowd he had declared seven months earlier that "Eastern Europe must never, and can never be a stable region until the Eastern European countries regain their independence," and that détente depended on "recognizing the legitimate aspirations" of Poland and Eastern Europe. However, this was not quite what Carter had said in March, and the difference, although slight, is revealing.¹³

In the earlier speech, Carter had said "we should remember that Eastern Europe is not an area of stability and it will not become such until the Eastern European countries regain their independence and become part of a larger cooperative European framework." By October, the key verbs shifted from the neutral "is not" and "will not become" to the much more active idea that Eastern Europe *must* and *can never* be stable until it becomes independent. The latter language is far more subversive and would foreshadow the policy that toward Poland that Carter pursued as president. In this speech, Carter drew together the disparate strands of his Polish policy for the first time and presented the overarching program as a whole. Carter intended to not only cooperate but also compete with the Soviet Union, and he did not see these as mutually exclusive. To this end, Carter told the Chicago Poles that while he preferred cooperation with the Soviet Union to a cold war, he would take firm "steps to show that we do care about freedom in Eastern Europe."¹⁴ These steps comprise the four main themes of Carter's policy toward Poland.

First, Carter sought the USSR's increased compliance with the Helsinki Accord's guarantee of human rights and freedom of movement. Carter called for America to be "constantly concerned about the preservation of human rights throughout the world" and pledged he would do nothing as president "to give the slightest indication that we will ever accept

¹³ *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 970, 1004; Ribuffo, pg. 389.

¹⁴ *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 113, 1004.

permanent Soviet domination over countries that want to be free. And you can depend on that.” Carter’s speechwriter during the campaign, Patrick Anderson, explained the effectiveness of utilizing human rights, as “liberals liked human rights because it involved political freedom and getting liberals out of jails in dictatorships, and conservatives liked it because it involved criticisms of Russia.” This was not a new idea, and extended the theme Carter had developed throughout the campaign, particularly the general campaign.¹⁵ Promoting human rights was not just a moral policy for Carter; it was also an aggressive component of détente. At a meeting of the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations on March 15, 1976. Carter argued that détente, as practiced by Ford, was skewed in favor of the Soviets, providing:

the benefits of the Helsinki Accords without the requirement of living up to the human rights provisions which form an integral part of it. This is not the road to peace but the bitter deception of the American people. . . . It is in our interest to try to make détente broader and more reciprocal. Détente can be an instrument for long-term peaceful change within the Communist system, as well as in the rest of the world.¹⁶

This was the critical difference in Carter’s thinking: détente was a means not only for arms reduction and trade but “long-term peaceful change” for Eastern Europe. Carter charged that Eastern Europe was inherently unstable because of its artificial division from Western Europe and because of the communist governments that had been imposed on the Poles and other Eastern Europeans against their will. This was a clear repudiation of the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine. “Carter was killing the Soviets with kindness,” Brzezinski said, “because he was talking about engagement, human rights, disarmament – but the Soviets knew what he was talking about.” It was becoming hard to separate the strategic from the humanitarian with regards

¹⁵ *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1004-5.

¹⁶ *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 113-116; Vaughan, “Political and Academic Life,” pg. 240.

to the human rights rhetoric.¹⁷ The emphasis on human rights was also influential within Eastern Europe and particularly Poland. Historian Bronislaw Geremek, a key member of Solidarity, recalled Brzezinski's stress on the Helsinki Final Act as crucial:

It was extremely important to us that Zbigniew Brzezinski...supported Basket Three. The dissidents, until this time, had this feeling of being marginal, and had no legal reference. But with the Helsinki agreement, and especially this "third basket," we could say to our government: "You signed it – if you signed the agreement, we are now asking about the agreements on freedom of information, freedom of expression, travels and so on." So Brzezinski's role in emphasizing the third basket was crucial, and this, I have no doubt, played a key role in the implosion of the Soviet empire.¹⁸

Human rights were a clear focus for Carter with regard to Eastern Europe. Among these rights was the freedom of information, which was closely linked to one of Brzezinski's signature causes: Radio Free Europe.

In his second step, Carter detailed, "we must insist, soundly, that the Soviet Union, as agreed to in the Helsinki Agreement, cease jamming Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty...there has to be access to those who live in Poland from the free world." In his view, the Ford administration had failed to exploit the enormous potential of these radio services. They were, in Carter's opinion, among the most powerful tools at America's disposal.¹⁹ Radio Free Europe was highly respected in Poland as one of the only credible, independent sources of news and programming. The opposition listened openly and the party clandestinely, but RFE wielded a power in Poland that the domestic news organs envied.²⁰ Accordingly, Carter stressed its role as

¹⁷ *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 116, 546, 693; Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pg. 335; Alexander J. Groth, "The Institutional Myth: Huntington's Order Revisited," *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (April 1979), pg. 218; Ribuffo, pg. 393; Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, in Vaughan, "Political and Academic Life," pg. 259.

¹⁸ Interview with Patrick Anderson, in Joshua Muravchik, *The uncertain crusade: Jimmy Carter and the dilemmas of human rights policy*, (Lanham: AEI Press, 1988), pg. 2; Interview with Bronislaw Geremek, in Vaughan, "Helsinki Final Act," pg. 13-14.

¹⁹ *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1004-5.

²⁰ Lechoslaw Gawlikowski, "The Audience to Western Broadcasting to Poland During the Cold War," in A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta, eds., *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: A Collection of Studies and Documents*, (Budapest: Central European University, 2010), pg. 124-126.

a vital part of his human rights policy.

Carter called these radio services the “most valuable instruments our nation has for this purpose.” He saw them as important American foreign policy tools, in contrast to those who sought a more independent role for the radios similar to that of BBC. By 1976, he was sharply critical of the decay of the services under Ford. VOA had “been entangled in a web of political restrictions imposed by the Department of State, which seriously limit its effectiveness,” according to a Carter campaign position paper on the radio services. Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty suffered from similar restrictions. Carter argued that the State Department had capitulated to Soviet protests. Carter charged, “for nearly a decade, our foreign policy leadership in Washington has ignored repeated warnings that the broadcast strength of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty is growing progressively weaker owing to jamming and inadequate transmitter power.” Funds for new technology and stronger transmitters dried up, and Soviet jamming enveloped the broadcasts in a hissing torrent of static.²¹

In contrast, Carter sought revitalization and expansion of RFE and the other radio agencies. “If détente with the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe is to have real meaning,” a campaign position paper charged, “we must work toward a freer flow of information and ideas for those countries.” At the meeting of Chicago Poles, Carter stressed that Radio Free Europe gave East Europeans more than just news, it gave them hope.²² RFE was particularly suited to the task because unlike the Voice of America, it included commentary and analysis of the news which provided a vital counterpoint to state-operated news. For Carter, the radio services were simultaneously a tool of the cold war and of human rights:

²¹ Because of the extremely similar work performed by RFE and RL, the two organizations merged in 1976; *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 694; Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), pg. 196, 206.

²² *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1004.

The radios are more than mere transmitters of information. They are the symbol of the U.S. commitment to peaceful change in Eastern Europe and a sign of continued engagement in Europe's future. If we remove the uncertainties that have arisen around our commitment to the radios...the American people can once again take pride in the fact that their foreign policy is an accurate reflection of their character and moral heritage.²³

In a remarkable, succinct fashion, the brief turned the conventional wisdom on its head, recasting Radio Free Europe not as propaganda but as a symbol of the new transparent government. Carter appealed to classic American values while at the same time throwing down a major intellectual gauntlet. His "commitment to peaceful change" in Eastern Europe was as direct an assault on the Yalta-Helsinki "status quo" as one can imagine short of deeming the Soviet Union the evil empire. In short, the radios would be the chosen instrument through which the American commitment to human rights and the liberation of Eastern Europe would be expressed.

The third prong of Carter's policy would be to encourage the existing economic and cultural ties to Poland. The candidate pledged to work "for an expanded network of human and commercial ties between the countries of the East and the countries of the West." That is, Carter would expand trade and cultural ties with Poland and other eastern European countries.²⁴ By 1976, Poland exported \$1 billion to the West and imported \$500 million. US-Polish relations were also marked by an array of cultural, educational, scientific, and technological exchanges. The Poles welcomed the opportunity for investment and training, while the Americans made every effort to expose Poland to the Western way of life. Carter argued that "expanding two-way trade" would help Poland cope with its serious economic difficulties.²⁵

These had been dramatically on display during the campaign when the Polish government

²³ *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 694.

²⁴ *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1004-5.

²⁵ CIA Report, "Soviet and East European Relations with the US and the West," November 1, 1976, CIA FOIAA Reading Room (online), pg. 1; *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 113, 266.

had announced on June 25, 1976 that it would raise food prices, which had caused rioting in several locales. The government rescinded the price hikes, but not before the world had witnessed the unrest simmering in Poland.²⁶

Communist countries could gain access to American markets and credits through the fourth prong of Carter's Eastern Europe policy: direct bilateral relations between the United States and East European countries, rather than the previous reliance on a Washington-Moscow relationship.²⁷ At a conference in Kansas City, Missouri on October 16, 1976, Carter said of Eastern Europe, "I would cease to treat them as a uniform block which has been the attitude of this administration. I would renounce immediately the so-called Sonnenfeldt Doctrine that says there is an organic link between these individual countries and the Soviet Union." Instead, Carter proposed dealing directly with the east European countries, bypassing Moscow whenever possible.²⁸ At a meeting of the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations on March 15, 1976, Carter argued, "Our vision must be of a more pluralistic world and not of a Communist monolith. We must pay more attention to China and to Eastern Europe."²⁹ Carter's view of the world was more multipolar, and he wanted to move away from an obsessive focus on bipolar US-USSR relations. The US-USSR relationship was the most important relationship, but not the only relationship of importance. In wanting to focus on other relationships in their own right, rather than through the prism of US-USSR relations, Carter was forging something new in American foreign policy with respect to his predecessor. This would have a great impact on relations toward Eastern Europe and Poland. Unlike the other three sections of Carter's Polish policy, this theme of bilateral

²⁶ Anthony Lewis, "Echoes of Helsinki," *The New York Times*, August 2, 1976; Burton Levinson, "Helsinki Agreement: One Year Later," *Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 1976; "Poland Announces Big Food-Price Rise," *The New York Times*, June 25, 1976; "Poland Cancels Food Prices Rises After Disorders," *The New York Times*, June 26, 1976.

²⁷ *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 116.

²⁸ *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1004-5.

²⁹ *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 117.

relations was a process, rather than a policy. It expressed how a Carter administration would see Poland, not necessarily what policies it would advance. Poland's party leader Edward Gierek welcomed this because of the prestige that it would bring not only Poland but also him as its leader. However, bilateral relations would serve as a means to tie Poland into a closer relationship with the United States, and therefore increase the costs to Poland for actions the United States would be unhappy with, such as the renewed repression of dissidents. By shifting to a direct dialogue with Poland and the other nations in the region, the United States would be better able to reward regimes that liberalized or observed the Basket Three provisions of the Helsinki accords.³⁰

Taken together, these four policies sketched out the relationship with Eastern Europe that Carter proposed: if the eastern European governments upheld their Helsinki obligations, the United States would pursue a bilateral relationship that would lead to increased credits and cultural exchanges. It was a more aggressive approach than that pursued by Ford. It stressed competing ideologically while cooperating politically and economically.

Ford's famous gaffe at the second debate served as the impetus for Carter to adopt a sharper criticism of the Ford Administration's policy toward Eastern Europe. What was initially a chance to score points with the electorate became an opportunity for the Carter campaign to develop his policy. An outline for action was sketched that would be translated directly into policy toward Poland during the incoming Carter Administration. Centered in the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Accords, Carter sought to encourage human rights, particularly through Radio Free Europe and with an array of cultural, educational, and scientific exchanges. This was accompanied by a new stress on bilateral relations with Poland to encourage the communist state's good behavior.

³⁰ *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 711, 1021.

Each aspect of the proposed Polish policy was enacted in the next four years. Human rights and Helsinki would become a rallying cry for the Carter Administration and the Polish opposition, which became stronger each year. Radio Free Europe and the radio agencies would be an important part of this process, and were all strengthened during the Carter Administration. They became a vital part of the daily life for the political underground in Poland. The policy toward the radio services in particular would bear the influence of Zbigniew Brzezinski; Polish policy was his brainchild throughout the Carter Administration. Agricultural and technological credits boosted Poland's struggling economy, while the exchange of personnel further facilitated the exchange of ideas. Partially as a result of the approach of the new administration, Poland's reaction to a wave of human rights activism in early 1977 would not be as severe as that of many of its neighbors. In 1980, the Polish opposition that had drawn together formed the powerful and influential Solidarity trade union. Although some of the policies were more successful than others, together they constituted the major themes of the next four years of U.S.-Polish relations. It was a policy that explicitly rejected the Sonnenfeldt doctrine and aggressively sought to liberalize the Polish social, economic, and political systems. While it was but one of many factors, it is reasonable to assume that Jimmy Carter's policy toward Poland – his promotion of human rights, Radio Free Europe, trade and cultural ties, and independence from Moscow – contributed to Solidarity's success.

Bibliography

Archival and Online Databases

Jimmy Carter Library
 CIA FOIA Reading Room
 DNSA
 Open Society Archives
 Frontline Diplomacy
 Proquest Historical Newspapers

Primary Sources

Brzezinski, Zbigniew. *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983.

Brzezinski, Zbigniew. *The Soviet Bloc, Unity and Conflict*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.

CIA Report, "Soviet and East European Relations with the US and the West," November 1, 1976, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online).

"East European Reactions to Sonnenfeldt." Radio Free Europe/Open Society Archives, Box-Folder-Report 99-6-83, pg. 7, <http://files.osa.ceu.hu/holdings/300/8/3/text/99-6-83.shtml>.

Sonnenfeldt Doctrine; Discussion at Chiefs of Mission Conference on U.S. Policy in Eastern Europe, December 13-14, 1975." Digital National Security Archives, Kissinger Transcripts, Item KTO1850.

U.S. Congress, *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Vol. 1-5. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979.

Secondary Sources

Foglesong, David S., *The American Mission and the "Evil Empire": The Crusade for a "Free Russia" since 1881*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Friedman, Norman, *The Fifty-Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2007.

Garthoff, Raymond, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 1994.

Gawlikowski, Lechoslaw, "The Audience to Western Broadcasting to Poland During the Cold War," in A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta, eds., *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the*

Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: A Collection of Studies and Documents. Budapest: Central European University, 2010.

Huntington, Samuel P., *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.

Isaacson, Walter, *Kissinger: A Biography*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005.

Jones, Jeffrey, "Gerald Ford Retrospective," December 29, 2006, Gallup, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/23995/Gerald-Ford-Retrospective.aspx#1>.

Kaiser, Robert, "U.S.-Soviet Relations: Goodbye to Détente." *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 59, No. 3, (1980).

Kaplan, Stephen S., "United States Aid to Poland, 1957-1964: Concerns, Objectives and Obstacles." *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (March 1975).

Kubricht, Paul A., "Politics and Foreign Policy: A Brief Look at the Kennedy Administration's Eastern European Diplomacy." *Diplomatic History* 11, no.1 (Winter 1987).

Muravchik, Joshua, *The Uncertain Crusade: Jimmy Carter and the Dilemmas of Human Rights policy*. Lanham: AEI Press, 1988.

Novak, Robert, *The Prince of Darkness: 50 Years of Reporting in Washington*. New York: Random House, 2008.

Puddington, Arch, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003.

Ribuffo, Leo, "Is Poland a Soviet Satellite? Gerald Ford, the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine, and the Election of 1976." *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (July 1990).

Rozell, Mark, *The Press and the Ford Presidency*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992.

Vaughan, Patrick G., "Zbigniew Brzezinski and Afghanistan," in Anna Kasten Nelson, *The Policy Makers: Shaping American Foreign Policy from 1947 to the present*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.

Vaughan, Patrick G., "Zbigniew Brzezinski and the Helsinki Final Act," in Leopold Nuti, *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: from Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Vaughan, Patrick G., "Zbigniew Brzezinski: The Political And Academic Life of a Cold War Visionary." Ph. D. dissertation. West Virginia University, 2003.

Wozniuk, Vladimir, *From Crisis to Crisis: Soviet-Polish Relations in the 1970s*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1987.

Periodicals

Foreign Affairs
Los Angeles Times
National Review
Newsweek
The New Yorker
New York Times
Time
Washington Post