

## **ABSTRACT**

TRENOR, BRIAN CHARLTON. *The Polish Desk: Radio Free Europe, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Jimmy Carter's Polish Policy 1976-1977*. (Under the direction of Dr. Nancy Mitchell).

This thesis focuses on Jimmy Carter's US-Polish policy as developed in the 1976 presidential campaign and employed in 1977. The policy was two-pronged: it sought to encourage both the Polish dissidents and the technocratic government of Edward Gierek through a blend of soft power tools, including human rights, Radio Free Europe, cultural exchanges, and economic incentives. Dealing with Warsaw on its own terms rather than through Moscow and extending economic aid to the Gierek regime was one side of the Carter administration's Polish policy. The other side was expressing cautious support for the rising dissident movement (which would soon become Solidarity) and expanding the services of Radio Free Europe. Together these two prongs cautiously encouraged Poland's autonomy from the Soviet Union. Carter was a cold warrior, and his nuanced, aggressive Polish policy is a window into how he fought the cold war.

Using newly declassified documents from the Jimmy Carter Library and the Declassified Documents Reference System, Radio Free Europe Research, as well as the press and interviews, I leverage original research to analyze US-Polish policy in a new light. Carter's Polish policy is a case study in the possibility of marrying idealism to national interest. Using my formulation of a two-pronged policy, I propose it is a lesson that these worlds do not have to be mutually exclusive. A subtle balance between US ideals and national interest must be sought. The Carter administration's policy toward Poland in 1977 provides a model.

The Polish Desk: Radio Free Europe, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Jimmy Carter's Polish Policy  
1976-1977

by  
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**DEDICATION**

To Arthur F. McMahon, Jr. – for teaching me to love history

To Jen – for teaching me to love

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Brian Trenor was born and raised in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and received his M.A. in History from North Carolina State University in 2011. His research interests include: US diplomatic, military, cultural, and religious history, the Cold War, and World War Two, as well as whatever else he's reading. In his free time, he enjoys gaming, movies, music, travel, sports, and reading.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis has been a labor of love, and there are several people who I wish to thank for their support. First, Dr. Nancy Mitchell has been an incredible guide and mentor in this process. She gave above and beyond of her time and sanity to make corrections, edits, and to push me to think deeper about the questions I posed, and she always had time to set aside when I needed it. This work would not have been the same without her guiding hand. I would also like to thank my committee members - Drs. Alex De Grand and Matthew Booker – who took the time to read my work, meet, and meet again. Their comments and suggestions were instrumental in helping me to think about the contours of this paper. Third, I would like to thank the members of Dr. Mitchell’s thesis advising group, or the “Carter Cult” as we affectionately called it. From beginning to end, their questions, suggestions, and comments helped to keep me sharp, and their comradeship was much appreciated. Fourth, I want to thank my family for their endless patience as this project dragged out, especially my parents, Frank and Susie Trenor. Thank you for your tireless encouragement and for believing in me. By watching untold war movies with me and sharing stories of times past, they, along with my grandfathers, inspired my love of history. Finally, I must thank my incredible wife, Jennifer Trenor. You have seen this project from inception to completion and tolerated my discussions and reflections, stacks of library books, and research trips. I could not have asked for a better research assistant! Most importantly, thank you for your unwavering love and support, for bolstering me when I wasn’t sure I could keep pushing, and for being along for the ride. To all of the above, and to all else who helped shape this work, I give my thanks.

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### **Introduction: “Drenched in the Blood of Heroism”**

Poland exists at the intersection of powerful, competing forces. From the days of old Rome, external forces had moved on Europe through the expansive land corridor between the Baltic and Black Seas. The advances of the Huns, Ostrogoths, and Mongols were here absorbed. While Poland had avoided the Black Death that devastated most of Europe, its history would bear scars just as black. The powerful states of Prussia and imperial Russia used it as the playground for their ambitions, and the Polish plains were a highway east for Gustavus Adolphus, Napoleon, and Hitler. While the Ottoman Empire pushed the limits of its empire through the Balkans and further, Russia and Prussia fought to dismember the nascent Polish state. And although the Austrian Empire often served as protector for much of present-day Eastern Europe, it too feasted on the Polish lands for centuries. During World War II and the Cold War, Poland was at the crossroads of great power conflict and ideological combat. As historian Norman Davies put it, “Poland’s geography is the villain of her history.” When told that the Allies did not want to fight both Hitler and Stalin simultaneously in 1940, a Polish officer declared “Then *we* shall fight Geography!”<sup>1</sup> With such pride and stubbornness, it is no surprise that in Solidarity leader Lech Walesa’s words, “Polish history has been drenched in the blood of heroism.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet in the public mind, Poland is often seen only as a “heroic victim,”<sup>3</sup> full of “hopelessly romantic, hopelessly moustachioed idiots who would actually gallop their horses

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<sup>1</sup> Norman Davies, *God’s Playground, a History of Poland, Part One: The Origins to 1795*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pg. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Lech Walesa, Arkadiusz Rybicki, *The Struggle and the Triumph: An Autobiography*, (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1992), pg. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Jerzy Lukowski and W.H. Zawadzki, *A Concise History of Poland*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pg. 163.

at big steel tanks.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, a country and a people which were only acted *upon* in the sad march of history. Before becoming serious about history, my own thinking subscribed to this paradigm.

This, however, is not such a story.

This is a story of Poles who decided to act rather than be acted upon, of Communists and conspirators alike who went their own way to defy the will of the Soviet Union – and eventually upend the Cold War. We know that Poland was the first to break away from the Warsaw Pact and start the flood of the “Revolution of 1989.”<sup>5</sup> We know that Solidarity, a central player in this development, was started by Walesa and others in Gdansk in August 1980. For years, “the actors had become thoroughly accustomed to the lines written for them by party ideologists. Yet here they were, rebelling against the director and rewriting the script. The make-believe world created by Communist propaganda had been shattered.”<sup>6</sup>

1980 and 1989 have been much written upon, and enjoy a rich literature of scholarship. The period immediately prior to 1980 has been written about much less, however. The origins of Solidarity have been studied, but primarily through a Polish lens. US-Polish relations have received some attention, but works concerning the Carter period are almost nonexistent – the further from Gdansk, the less one finds. A notable exception here is historian Patrick Vaughan, whose work aided my thinking on this subject. Vaughan,

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<sup>4</sup> An allusion to the widely held and erroneous myth of Polish cavalry attacking German tanks with lances in 1939; Julian Borger, “Debunking Polish stereotypes: the cavalry charge against German tanks,” *The Guardian*, April 5, 2001, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/06/myth-of-polish-cavalry-charge>; Gilbert J. Mros, “The Mythical Polish Cavalry Charge,” *Polish American Journal*, July 2008, [http://www.polamjournal.com/Library/APHistory/Cavalry\\_Myth/cavalry\\_myth.html](http://www.polamjournal.com/Library/APHistory/Cavalry_Myth/cavalry_myth.html).

<sup>5</sup> Albania excepted; Milan Kundera, “The Tragedy of Central Europe,” *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 31, Issue 7, pg. 33; Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern : The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague*, (New York : Vintage Books, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Michael Dobbs, *Down with Big Brother*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), pg. 32.

however, was primarily concerned with the academic and political career of Carter's National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, while this thesis seeks to examine in depth – for the first time – Jimmy Carter's Polish policy as it was developed in the 1976 presidential campaign and implemented in 1977. The human rights policy, Radio Free Europe (RFE), US economic policy, and KOR,<sup>7</sup> Solidarity's antecedent, have all been written about elsewhere, but they are here taken up as part of a coordinated trend and seen through the lens of the US-Polish relationship.

Carter adopted Brzezinski's concepts of "peaceful engagement" and "evolutionary change" and enacted a two-pronged approach toward Poland. On the one hand, the Carter administration would support Polish dissidents through Radio Free Europe, cultural exchanges, and the global human rights campaign; the goal was to stimulate the development of democratic forces within Poland. On the other hand, the administration also enacted measures intended to stabilize Poland's moderate technocratic leader, Edward Gierek. These included public pronouncements, trade deals, economic, technological, and scientific exchanges, and official visits. The Carter administration's policy toward Poland in 1977 was therefore nuanced and two-pronged. It sought to stabilize the government in Warsaw and at the same time to encourage Poles in their opposition to that very government.

Why did Washington pursue such an apparently contradictory policy? The answer, which will unfold in the following pages, is simple: both prongs of Carter's policy sought to undermine Soviet domination of Poland – without precipitating an international crisis.

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<sup>7</sup> The Worker's Defense Committee.

Supporting Gierek signaled support for a moderate East European leader who was interested in opening trade with the West. Gierek was less authoritarian and ideological than his colleagues in the region. His technocrats believed in “socialist consultation,” and encouraged the “open exchange of arguments based on expert knowledge,” as Christoph Royen writes. At the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), Poland had confidently asserted that “freer movement of people and ideas” would not be problematic, and welcomed peaceful cooperation and competition. Gierek wanted Poland to be a bridge between East and West, and was eager to preserve “Poland’s liberal image in the West.”<sup>8</sup>

Supporting Gierek and Polish economic development would forestall the economic or political collapse of the regime which could have led to a crackdown or Soviet intervention. Carter did *not* want to tip the balance into chaos and revolution, which would invite a new invasion along the lines of Hungary or Czechoslovakia and thereby plunge the region into instability or even open war. Carter knew that US options in such an eventuality would be very, very limited. He wanted to encourage democratic forces within Poland to push the regime toward liberalization, but not to the point of ruin. His policy was designed to avoid progress in Poland that was either too slow (which would not achieve change quickly enough) or too quick (which would attract the intervention of Moscow). Steady liberalization was the goal.

In many ways, this thesis centers around the importance of words and ideas. Michael Hunt says US foreign policy is “incomprehensible, perhaps inconceivable” without

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<sup>8</sup> Christoph Royen, “The Northern Tier,” in Richard Vine, ed., *Soviet-East European Relations as a Problem for the West*, (New York: Croom Helm, 1987), pg. 80-81; F. Stephen Larrabee, “The Southern Tier,” in Richard Vine, ed., *Soviet-East European Relations as a Problem for the West*, (New York: Croom Helm, 1987), pg. 101.

considering the effect of ideas and ideology upon it.<sup>9</sup> Walter Russell Mead has outlined four basic schools of American foreign policy: Wilsonian idealists, Jeffersonian democrats, Hamiltonian realists, and Jacksonian populists.<sup>10</sup> As Joseph Nye has written, these “foreign policy traditions...overlap, reinforce, and sometimes conflict with each other.”<sup>11</sup>

Realists such as George Kennan argued “governing is not a moral exercise, but rather the practical function of maintaining order and discipline in the interest of social stability,” and he saw the imposition of a “legalistic-moralistic approach” to international relations foolish. Others looked to Woodrow Wilson who, Korey argues, believed patriotism was “first of all the duty to defend and, where feasible, to advance democratic principles in the world at large.” Railing against the Kissingerian, Hamiltonian realism of Nixon and Ford, Carter combined the “beacon on a hill,” America-as-paragon Jeffersonian ideal with a streak of Jackson and the evangelizing zeal of Wilsonian thinking. Years later, Carter responded to realist critics that if the United States ignored human rights, it would “lose influence and moral authority in the world.”<sup>12</sup> Carter sought to introduce openness and morality into America’s foreign policy, but as Karl Marx wrote long ago, “Men make their own history, but they don’t make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pg. 172.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*, (London: Psychology Press, 2002), pg. xvii.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, (Jackson: PublicAffairs, 2004), pg.139-140.

<sup>12</sup> William Korey, *The Promises We Keep: Human Rights, the Helsinki Process, and American Foreign Policy*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), pg. xvi-xv.

<sup>13</sup> Hunt, pg. 171.

Arthur Schlesinger in 1978 asked the future historian to trace the “internal discussions during the interregnum that culminated in the striking words of the [Carter] inaugural address.” This historian will not take up Schlesinger’s task, but in a small way try to examine how these bold words guided policy toward one country – Poland. Soon upon arriving in office, Carter was carried into the current of an existing strategic reality which challenged his claim to an “absolute” commitment to human rights. He also found what I have termed his “human rights offensive” under vicious public attack, and it was soon modified. U.S policy toward Poland acrobatically sought to support the burgeoning dissident movement in Poland while also supporting Gierek’s moderate regime. It would ensure this through an architecture of bilateral relations, economic incentives, cultural exchanges, the broadcasts of Radio Free Europe, and human rights advocacy.<sup>14</sup>

This thesis is a case study in the development of foreign relations, and of Carter’s diplomacy in particular. His Polish policy was anti-Soviet, in some ways implicitly and in some ways explicitly. It bore the stamp of Brzezinski and increasingly that of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. It was a new way of fighting the cold war. It was a reaction *to* the Helsinki Accords and a reaction *against* what the Carter team saw as the amoral realpolitik of Nixon, Ford, and Kissinger. Carter’s Polish policy saw the development of a Poland internationally independent (*à la* Yugoslavia and Finland) and politically pluralistic as a positive development. If not as verbally aggressive as the “rollback” of the 1950s, the policy was more akin to Eisenhower’s than the realism of the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine. In many ways Carter’s policy was a more potent threat to the Soviet bloc – a threat the Soviets recognized.

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<sup>14</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., “Human Rights and the American Tradition,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (1978), pg. 514.

At the same time, it brought to bear an array of soft power tools which the US government wielded in order to shape Poland's internal dynamics and seek American aims. The Polish policy would encourage the development of democratic forces within Poland by supporting the dissidents (and, more widely, in Eastern Europe) while maintaining stability and forestalling Soviet intervention or invasion by stabilizing the regime of Edward Gierk, who desired economic growth foremost and did not see the presence of opposition groups within Poland as antithetical to socialism. Carter's foreign policy was envisioned as a carefully calibrated system of what Brzezinski called "reciprocal accommodation."<sup>15</sup> By putting pressure on Moscow through the Helsinki review conferences, for instance at Belgrade in 1977, and by supporting the Polish dissidents, America could create a situation in which the Soviets were on the defensive internally and internationally. Theoretically, this process would push the Soviets to participate in the trade of not just technology and grain but ideas and theories. William Hyland later explained the potency of this process, as "the human rights issue struck at the very legitimacy and survival of the Soviet political structure."<sup>16</sup>

This project is conceived as an unabashed work of diplomatic history, which these days is something akin to asking to be treated like an outsider arriving in the Old West saloon, the plinky-plink piano music stopping as residents warily size up the interloper. I do not see such an approach as "too traveled to yield exciting new vistas or lead into territory yet unexplored," much the opposite. Yet at the same time, I do not dismiss the need to bring new and unanalyzed groups, ideas, and concepts into the folds of history. Drawing from the

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<sup>15</sup> Brian J. Auten, *Carter's Conversion: The Hardening of American Defense Policy*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), pg. 291.

<sup>16</sup> William G. Hyland, *Mortal Rivals: Superpower Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, (New York: Random House, 1987), pg. 128.

thinking of historians like Hunt and Gordon Craig, this paper takes up a recurring historical problem, what Craig describes as the “translation of ideas into action and theory into practice and the subtle ways in which they are modified and transformed into the process by the play of circumstance, chance, and individual idiosyncrasy.”<sup>17</sup> Having said this, I also identify closely with narrative history and the idea of the historian-as-storyteller, and so I hope that this work not only contributes to my field but is also an enjoyable, enlightening story.

My own path to this topic was circuitous, as my thesis group will attest. I first became interested in Poland as a function of the end of the Cold War, chiefly through an undergraduate seminar on US foreign policy taught by Dr. Nancy Mitchell, who would later become the advisor for this project. Afterward, these ideas lay dormant until my honeymoon a few weeks before I started graduate school. In one of those serendipitous accidents of life, I met a Polish Texas-oilman-by-way-of-Germany while getting my wife a drink at the swim-up bar in sun-drenched Nassau, and we talked for a few minutes about Poland and history. Thereafter, I more and more wanted to understand the role this country played in the Cold War. Like many others, I was initially drawn like a moth to the drama and spectacle of 1980 and its aftermath, which had (and has) more documents available, more secondary literature to guide me, and seemed to me “where the story was.” Yet over time, and at the urging of my committee, I took second, third, and fourth looks at the documents and sources I had collected. I began to realize a subtler, untold story had been staring me in the face all along. The words of Isaac Newton resonated with me: “I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and

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<sup>17</sup> Gordon Craig, “Political History,” *Daedalus*, Vol. 100, No. 2 (Spring 1971): 325-327.

diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.”<sup>18</sup> US-Polish policy, and Carter’s in particular, had not yet been studied in the depth they deserved. Similarly, the application of Carter’s human rights policy has been studied with regard to Central America, the USSR, Iran, China, Cambodia, and a host of other countries – but never toward Poland. The decision to focus exclusively on 1976 and 1977 is admittedly arbitrary: the currently available sources and constraints of time, money, and the form of a Master’s thesis all contributed to this framing. Perhaps someday I or another scholar can carry on the story past 1977 and enrich the framework I have established here with new sources and insights.

In examining the 1976 campaign history, I happened upon a speech Carter delivered in Chicago where he, in essence, outlined the entirety of his Polish policy as president. In Chapter One, I analyze the development of this policy in the presidential campaign and its formalization as a four-pronged program in the Chicago speech (this becomes a two-pronged approach in 1977). From this starting point, I use the framework outlined in Chapter One as a lens through which to understand US-Polish policy from Carter’s inauguration until his trip to Warsaw in December 1977. Chapter Two briefly sets up the Polish economic situation and the June 1976 riots which backdrop this story. Chapter Three examines the US human rights policy and its application to Poland, which occurred primarily through the guise of Radio Free Europe, covering January through April. This approach encouraged the dissidents and linked their cause to traditional American values, but it also spurred unrest. Chapter Four takes up the story as the “quiet diplomacy” championed by Vance softened Brzezinski’s

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<sup>18</sup> Mitch Stokes, *Isaac Newton*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pg. 127.

more dramatic approach. The US increasingly emphasized bilateral and economic relations to encourage Gierek's stability as tensions in Poland mounted. Each of these prongs worked in concert, not against each other, in a balanced system to encourage the moderate middle and "evolutionary change." This policy reached a crescendo in the December visit of Carter to Poland, an event that caused both the regime and its critics to feel reinforced and respected.

This narrative, or "story" rests upon original research, conducted primarily at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library in Atlanta. I was especially fortunate to enjoy access to many newly declassified documents at the Carter Library and from the online Declassified Documents Reference System and the CIA FOIA Reading Room. However, there are still significant gaps in the available sources – due to the lack of State Department documents, my tale skews toward the White House, the National Security Council, and Zbigniew Brzezinski in particular.

However, I have attempted to balance this by citing relevant primary sources and the interviews of Frontline Diplomacy where possible. Frontline Diplomacy in particular gave me an insight into the thinking of those at the operational level in the State Department. The excellent reports of Radio Free Europe's research operation were invaluable in understanding the internal forces at play within Poland, and are cited throughout this thesis. The American Presidency Project, Cold War International History Project Digital Archive, Digital National Security Archives, Open Society Archives, and Duke University Archives added crucial pieces to the puzzle, as did an array of press sources. I also drew from memoirs where relevant, including the writings of Carter, Vance, Brzezinski, William Hyland, Robert Gates, Raymond Garthoff, William Korey, and others.

As well, I benefited from the accumulated research of many talented scholars whose works on Polish history, US foreign policy, human rights, Radio Free Europe, KOR and the Cold War I fused together to make this contribution to the discussion. Norman Davies' landmark two-volume *God's Playground: A History of Poland* and *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present* encouraged me to look at Polish history widely but also deeply. Gaddis Smith's *Morality, Reason, & Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* encouraged me to do the same for the United States. The dissertations of Philip Peterson and Patrick Vaughan were crucial in thinking about the interplay between US-Polish policy and human rights. Arch Puddington's *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* and Michael Nelson's *War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War* were great resources about Radio Free Europe. My analysis of the radios' effectiveness was aided immeasurably by the timely publishing of the Ross Johnson and R. Parta's *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* compilation, which gave me access to new data and research on the subject. I feel that such a varied blend of sources and inspiration as outlined above is only fitting for a subject of this complexity.<sup>19</sup>

Carter's Polish policy was intricate, subtle, and at times seemingly contradictory. It was provocative, controversial, and while it took cues from previous administrations, was an animal all its own. This tale is a useful insight into the development of foreign policy, which does not always, if ever, go according to plan. It demonstrates the power of ideas and the usefulness – and trickiness – of soft power. The Polish policy was a middle way between too

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<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, however, my intellectual debt is immense and far longer than I could contain within this short introduction. To all of those who went before me, I extend my heartfelt thanks.

little and too much pressure. Maintaining such a delicate balance is tricky, but the Carter administration's success in doing so contravenes the traditional narrative that Carter's foreign policy was naïve, doomed, and ultimately a failure.

## Chapter One: The 1976 Presidential Campaign and “The Ultimate Polish Joke”<sup>20</sup>

Although Gerald Ford’s assertion that “there is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe” was, according to pollster George Gallup, the “most decisive moment in the campaign,” Poland was not a centerpiece issue until the second presidential debate. Prior to the debate, Poland was mentioned as part of the wider “Soviet bloc” and Yugoslavia considered more likely as a potential flashpoint with the Soviet Union.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the primary and general campaign, Jimmy Carter outlined the major points that would comprise policy toward Poland throughout his presidency, but initially his rhetoric concerning Eastern Europe was vague and unfocused. In the weeks following the second debate, the Carter team took full advantage of Ford’s gaffe and leapt on the Eastern Europe issue like a loose football. With the ready help of Carter’s key foreign policy advisor, Polish-born Zbigniew Brzezinski, an inchoate Eastern Europe policy was fleshed out and detailed.

### “This détente business is fun”<sup>22</sup>

Ford was hewing to a trend established long before he entered the White House. Immediately following World War Two, the United States issued Poland an emergency loan for \$80 million. Like other communist nations, Poland turned down badly needed Marshall Plan funds under pressure from the Soviet Union. The West viewed the orthodox turn of the socialist camp poorly and shut out the communist states from the coveted Most-Favored-

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<sup>20</sup> This chapter draws from the speeches and papers published in the five volume *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, and subsequent uses of “the published campaign documents” use this as their basis; quote from William F. Buckley, Jr., “Mr. Ford’s Polish Joke,” *National Review*, November 12, 1976, (Vol. 28 Issue 43), pg. 1252.

<sup>21</sup> *The Presidential Campaign 1976, Volume One, Part Two, Jimmy Carter*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1978), pg. 1024; William Hyland, *Mortal Rivals: Superpower Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, (New York: Random House, 1987), pg. 173.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Kaiser, “U.S.-Soviet Relations: Goodbye to Détente,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 59, No. 3, (1980), pg. 502.

Nation status as well as from future loans and membership in international organizations such as the IMF.<sup>23</sup> The Eisenhower Administration later relaxed restrictions on Eastern Europe (particularly Poland and Yugoslavia) in the hopes of gaining influence in the region. It was thought that aid would reduce Poland's dependency on the Soviet Union "and thereby increase Warsaw's ability to make policy shifts, both economic and otherwise."<sup>24</sup> Agricultural credits granted Poland in 1956 under the PL-480 program inaugurated the US-Polish economic relationship during the Cold War, the first of several such capital infusions.<sup>25</sup> These credits were supplemented by additional aid packages passed by Congress.<sup>26</sup> To this end, \$95 million was extended in 1957, \$98 million in 1958, and \$103 million in 1959.<sup>27</sup> The US government was not universally happy with this advent. In heated high-level meetings, officials had argued whether Poland's Gomulka was really independent of Moscow. John Foster Dulles said it was a "close decision" on Gomulka's true allegiance, but it was hoped the credits would encourage his independence.<sup>28</sup> Still, Poland's Gomulka "presented the image of a potential Tito in a country much more strategically important than

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<sup>23</sup> Clement J. Zablocki, "American Aid to Poland," *Polish American Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (July – Dec. 1962), pg. 110.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen S. Kaplan, "United States Aid to Poland, 1957-1964: Concerns, Objectives and Obstacles," *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (March 1975), pg. 152.

<sup>25</sup> PL-480 was signed into law in 1954 by President Eisenhower, who said the program would "lay the basis for a permanent expansion of our exports of agricultural products with lasting benefits to ourselves and peoples and peoples of other lands." PL-480 is also known as the "Food For Peace" program, which was the name given the program under President John F. Kennedy; "The History of America's Food Aid," USAID, [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/humanitarian\\_assistance/ffp/50th/history.html](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/ffp/50th/history.html).

<sup>26</sup> "US Overseas Loans and Grants: Assistance Data," USAID, <http://gbk.eads.usaidallnet.gov/data/>.

<sup>27</sup> Zablocki, pg. 110.

<sup>28</sup> 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), pg. 386.

Yugoslavia,” in the words of the president himself.<sup>29</sup> This question of allegiance would remain throughout the rest of the Cold War.

Poland’s MFN status was restored in 1960, and a \$130 million loan authorized for 1960. Aid, which had until then consisted solely of loans, immediately decreased in the 1960s, however, falling to \$44 million in 1961. This brought the total aid to Poland since 1956 to nearly \$461 million, according to Polish-American Congressman Clement Zablocki (D-WI).<sup>30</sup> The Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations would see commerce as a “largely unexploited area where considerable American influence could be brought to bear” and hopefully “stimulate liberalizing trends.”<sup>31</sup>

Zbigniew Brzezinski, a rising star at Columbia University and advisor to the Kennedy campaign, wrote speeches for the Kennedy administration urging “peaceful engagement” toward Eastern Europe to slowly wean it out from the Soviet empire. He felt the rise of “national communism” within Eastern Europe and an increasingly independent China would provoke disunity in the communist camp.<sup>32</sup> Roman Szporluk, a leading scholar on Ukraine, later recalled “Brzezinski was one of the only people at that time who understood that the existence of nationalism in Eastern Europe tended to stimulate the nationalist sentiments within the USSR.” The Kennedy administration would in fact strive for “peaceful

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<sup>29</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Waging Peace, 1956-1961*, (New York: Doubleday, 1965), pg. 59, cited in Stephen S. Kaplan, “United States Aid to Poland, 1957-1964: Concerns, Objectives and Obstacles,” *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (March 1975), pg. 148.

<sup>30</sup> Zablocki, pg. 110.

<sup>31</sup> 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.

<sup>32</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc, Unity and Conflict*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), pg. 265-266.

engagement” through cultural contact and other means. This was made difficult, however, by Soviet charges of American meddling in the internal affairs of others.<sup>33</sup>

Some scholars such as Robert Kaplan have argued, however, that none of these administrations conceived of “aid as an instrument of exchange for obtaining major policy shifts in Warsaw. It was only expected that, if the regime survived and became secure, it would initiate as a result of its own interests, policies relatively supportive of American objectives as compared with policies of an alternative regime in Poland and other regimes in East Europe.”<sup>34</sup> In either case, trade became more difficult as aid packages grew more controversial in Congress, which by 1962 had also noticed Gomulka’s increasing conservatism in foreign policy. Most likely Gomulka’s reasons mirrored that of his successor Edward Gierek, who as a result of US-Polish trade would relax domestic political restrictions while simultaneously becoming more orthodox in foreign policy in order to mollify the Soviet Union.<sup>35</sup> Kennedy sidestepped attempts to revoke Poland’s MFN status, and by the mid-1960s bilateral trade was important enough to attract boycotts of Polish meat by the viscerally anti-communist émigré community.<sup>36</sup>

Nixon and Ford would carry on with a more pronounced economic focus, stepping back from cultural exchanges and the like. Raymond Garthoff explains: “improved terms for trade and economic relations were seen as the principal incentive the US government could

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<sup>33</sup> Interview of Carroll R. Sherer, *Frontline Diplomacy*; 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.

<sup>34</sup> Kaplan, pg. 165.

<sup>35</sup> Vladimir Wozniuk, *From Crisis to Crisis: Soviet-Polish Relations in the 1970s*, (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1987), pg. 62.

<sup>36</sup> 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).

provide the countries of Eastern Europe.”<sup>37</sup> However, according to USAID figures, all PL-480 and USAID assistance to Poland was stopped in FY1971, a trend which would continue for the next decade. By the mid-1970s the United States had all but neglected the desire to seek a “liberalizing” influence with its East Europe policy. Poland’s economic situation had begun to come unhinged as its loans began to come due in 1972,<sup>38</sup> just as the world economy was about to descend into depression following the Yom-Kippur War and the ensuing Arab oil embargo. 1974 saw the US-Soviet relationship especially strained, as “convinced that the United States was meddling in emigration policy and generally encouraging dissent, Soviet leaders cracked down on dissidents at home and in Eastern Europe.” That December, Congress passed the Jackson-Vanik agreement barring MFN status from states with restrictive emigration policies. Moscow cancelled its trade agreement with America and called on its Warsaw Pact allies to follow suit. Poland and Yugoslavia, it should be noted, were always exempted from the requirements of the Jackson-Vanik amendment and therefore had less incentive to change course.<sup>39</sup>

As détente progressed, MBFN, CSCE, and SALT I became more important. Soviet cooperation likewise became more necessary to achieve these ends. Direct “shuttle diplomacy” was conducted by Henry Kissinger with Moscow rather than through East Berlin, Prague, or Warsaw. Radio Free Europe broadcasts or White House receptions of dissidents like Solzhenitsyn became much more problematic. Broadcasts found their funding

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<sup>37</sup> Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, (Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 1994), pg. 550.

<sup>38</sup> Zablocki, pg. 110.

<sup>39</sup> Ribuffo, pg. 389.

cut and dissidents found turned backs. Cultural contacts, if not too provocative, continued. Commercial, industrial, and scientific exchanges continued apace.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Sonnenfeldt Doctrine**

The most famous formulation of Ford's policy on Eastern Europe was the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine. At its core, Sonnenfeldt is a pragmatic rather than an idealistic "doctrine."<sup>41</sup> The doctrine viewed the division of Europe as unfortunate but a fact of life. Given this state of affairs, nationalist uprisings by Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, and others were seen as negative and destabilizing influences. To head them off, the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine encouraged a closer relationship between the Warsaw Pact states and Moscow rather than trying to draw the satellite states away from the USSR via "peaceful engagement." A more "organic" relationship would create stability in Eastern Europe and avert a possible war over the region. In Sonnenfeldt's view, the USSR was just beginning to reach the height of its power, and thus was too dangerous to confront directly. At the same time, given that the Soviet system "is subject to flaws and to requirements which in some cases only the outside world can meet," the economic and scientific relationship between the West and the USSR would continue, but the cultural exchanges would have less utility under this doctrine, and therefore receive less attention. Similarly, ideological combat for the hearts and minds of Eastern Europeans such as through Radio Free Europe was inadvisable. This, of course, would leave millions in the grip of a system they neither welcomed nor supported; however, Sonnenfeldt hoped they would overcome their "romantic inclinations." Eventually, it was hoped, the Soviet Union would voluntarily write off its empire in Eastern Europe as

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<sup>40</sup> Ford, on Kissinger's advice, declined to receive Solzhenitsyn when he visited Washington D.C. in the summer of 1975; Ribuffo pg. 394.

<sup>41</sup> As will be explained below, some contend that Sonnenfeldt's ideals are not a true doctrine at all.

too great a liability. The Americans intended to outlast the Soviets historically, but any systemic change was expected to come through Moscow, not Prague, Warsaw, Budapest, or Belgrade.<sup>42</sup>

The Sonnenfeldt Doctrine was outlined at a London meeting of American ambassadors stationed in Western and Eastern Europe on December 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>, 1975. Helmut Sonnenfeldt, German émigré, State Department counselor, and sometime rival of Henry Kissinger, held to the establishment view on Eastern Europe policy, complaining “it seems that today you can’t just get payment for the goods you sell – you must get Jewish emigration, or arms restraint, or any number of other things.” The status quo was unbreakable, and so needlessly antagonizing the Soviet Union on the small scale would take away from the larger stability of détente. Sonnenfeldt contrasted American lending policies with those of the European allies, in that while the United States extended financing for individually approved projects, “the Europeans have surrendered on this point” and extended blanket lines of credit. He felt an American shift toward this line of thinking would draw the USSR into dependency on the West and gain leverage for the United States “to break down the autarkial nature of the USSR.” Sonnenfeldt also echoed the opinion of Secretary Kissinger that failing to achieve most-favored-nation status with the Soviets was a “long-term” setback on this front.<sup>43</sup>

Sonnenfeldt started “from the premise, the historic fact that we are witnessing the emergence of the Soviet Union as a super power on a global scale” and that Russia was “just

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<sup>42</sup> “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. 66-69. Hereafter, it will be abbreviated as Sonnenfeldt Doctrine.

<sup>43</sup> Sonnenfeldt Doctrine, pg. 47-48.

now developing modalities for carrying out such a global policy.” Unlike past imperial powers, however, the Soviet Union was acting erratically during its rise and sowing instability in Europe and beyond. This state of affairs compelled the West to react accordingly. Kissinger and the Ford Administration felt that this should be met by economic incentives. Sonnenfeldt agreed, asserting that the communist system “is subject to flaws and to requirements which in some cases only the outside world can meet.” Noting the increasing pressure of Eastern European groups to “break out of the Soviet straitjacket,” the counselor continued: “The Soviets’ inability to acquire loyalty in Eastern Europe is an unfortunate historical failure because Eastern Europe is within their scope and area of natural interest. It is doubly tragic that in this area of vital interest and crucial importance it has not been possible for the Soviet Union to establish roots of interest that go beyond sheer power.”<sup>44</sup>

Sonnenfeldt argued that it was in the United States’ interest to remain involved at least peripherally in Eastern Europe so that it would not “sooner or later explode, causing WW III,” calling this scenario a greater threat to world peace than the Cold War itself. Any “excess of zeal on our part is bound to produce results that could reverse the desired process [Eastern Europe breaking away from the USSR] for a period of time, even though in my view the process would remain inevitable within the next 100 years.” Sonnenfeldt called for a more “organic” relationship between the East Europeans and Moscow, arguing that this would be less dangerous than the current relationship. He also hoped the Poles would continue to be “able to overcome their romantic political inclinations which have led to their disasters in the past.” Although he hoped that the organic relationship would move beyond

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<sup>44</sup> Sonnenfeldt Doctrine, pg. 66-67.

one maintained by brute power, Sonnenfeldt recognized “the arguments that we are helping the Soviets maintain their control over Eastern Europe. I would again argue that there is no alternative open to us other than that of influencing the way Soviet power is used.”<sup>45</sup>

In many ways, what Sonnenfeldt had outlined was neither groundbreaking nor even a doctrine *per se*, merely detailing what had been the status quo attitude toward Eastern Europe since the Eisenhower Administration (with the possible exception of the Kennedy Administration). Since it was delivered in private and later leaked to the press, there had been no need to add qualifiers in order to please constituencies. However, the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine in practice ignored several significant variables. By operating on the assumption that relations via Moscow were the only way to achieve results, diplomats looked past Poland’s increased autonomy in economic and domestic affairs when compared to much of the Soviet bloc. The Sonnenfeldt Doctrine in fact had the most application with regard to Poland, which was strategically important for war planning and also had the most active anti-Soviet opposition.

The Sonnenfeldt Doctrine overestimated the sensitivity of the Soviet Union. By dealing with the satellite states individually rather than through Moscow, the United States would be able to not only encourage reform, but also to put pressure on the Soviet Union to allow these developments without ceding the moral high ground and “abandoning” Eastern Europe. The Soviets certainly had limits to what they would tolerate, but a degree of latitude was evident in their dealings with Eastern Europe.

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<sup>45</sup> Sonnenfeldt Doctrine, pg. 68-69.

The Sonnenfeldt Doctrine was not only presented in London but also cabled to other embassies. A copy of this cable found its way into investigative journalist Robert Novak's hands with the help of Richard Perle, then a staffer for Senator Henry Jackson (D-WA), who had drafted the Jackson-Vanik amendment that Sonnenfeldt had criticized. Rowland Evans and Robert Novak's article detailing the doctrine broke in late March 1976. The authors wrote that the meeting "exposes the underpinnings of détente."<sup>46</sup> In Novak's words, the "authentic State Department response" came in a *Washington Post* column wherein Stephen Rosenfeld denied a Sonnenfeldt Doctrine at all, arguing "my point is not that the policy is beyond criticism but that it's old hat." Novak later wrote "The State Department defense was that Sonnenfeldt was merely reiterating old policy. That did not please [Polish-American] Ed Derwinski (R-IL) and the ethnic vote."<sup>47</sup> Although many were truly outraged, many saw a political opportunity. Brzezinski later noted in an interview, "There is no doubt that Evans and Novak pumped it up. But yes, in a larger sense it [the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine] did reflect this notion of condominium... 'we can't do better than that [a democratic Western but not Eastern Europe] so let's settle for what we can.' So it enabled Carter to seize the optimistic vision and to deny it to his opponent and make himself look as a man of the future and a man of American optimism versus American, and maybe even European pessimism."<sup>48</sup>

Kissinger tried to ignore the situation to no avail. Implying that Sonnenfeldt had "wandered off the reservation," he grimly remarked, "it if were truly a new doctrine of this

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<sup>46</sup> Norman Friedman, *The Fifty-Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2007), pg. 414; Ribuffo pg. 394; Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), pg. 664-665.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Novak, *The Prince of Darkness: 50 Years of Reporting in Washington*, (New York: Random House, 2008), pg. 277.

<sup>48</sup> Interview of Zbigniew Brzezinski, in Patrick Vaughan, "Zbigniew Brzezinski: The Political And Academic Life of a Cold War Visionary," dissertation, West Virginia University, 2003, pg. 245.

administration, it would not be named after Hal Sonnenfeldt.”<sup>49</sup> Ronald Reagan and a raft of others left and right vocally criticized US acquiescence to Soviet expansion. The incident brought to mind spheres of influence and the failed promises of Yalta. Polish-Americans boiled at the “romantic inclinations” remark. Even Radio Warsaw found this doctrine alarming, lamenting the perceived *quid pro quo* of, “We have written off Eastern Europe; you should now write off Western Europe.”<sup>50</sup> This, then, was the trend of policy that served as a backdrop to the presidential election of 1976. Pundits and policymakers were once again grappling with exactly how the United States should deal with an Eastern Europe under Soviet control, and the time seemed right for a change in doctrine.

### **The Second Debate**

The second presidential debate was 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 held a thirty-three point lead in the Gallup poll following the Democratic Convention, the “largest margin recorded in modern polling.”<sup>51</sup> This had dropped throughout August, with Ford cutting the “August deficit” to thirteen points following the GOP convention.<sup>52</sup> Carter was still in a strong

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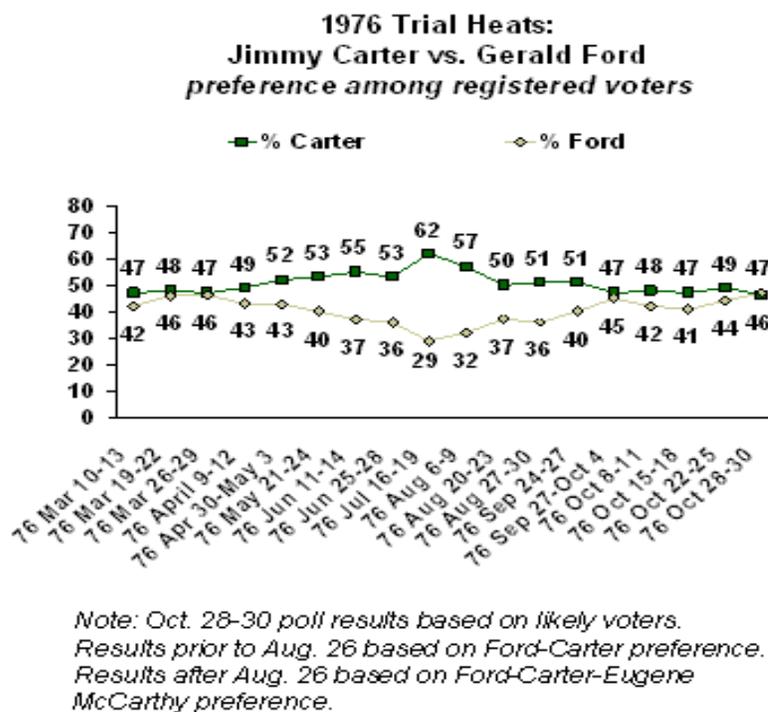
<sup>49</sup> Sonnenfeldt returned fire on Kissinger in a remark to Senator Patrick Moynihan: “You do not understand. Henry does not lie because it is his interest. He lies because it is his nature.” Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), pg. 665-6.

<sup>50</sup> “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>.

<sup>51</sup> Patrick Vaughan, “Zbigniew Brzezinski and the Helsinki Final Act,” in Leopoldo Nuti, *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: from Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), pg. 11.

<sup>52</sup> July 16-19, Carter 62%, Ford 29%; August 20-23, Carter 50%, Ford 37%; Jeffery Jones, “Gerald Ford Retrospective,” December 29, 2006, *Gallup*, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/23995/Gerald-Ford-Retrospective.aspx#1>.

position, holding an eleven point lead before the first debate on September 23.<sup>53</sup> Ford acquitted himself well, narrowing the race to a statistical dead heat.<sup>54</sup>



**Figure 1: Gallup Election Polling<sup>55</sup>**

The candidates prepared in very different ways. Ford had engaged in a series of mock debates with Henry Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft in the preceding weeks. According to according to historian Patrick Vaughan, Carter prepared the day before for a few hours over breakfast with just one advisor: Zbigniew Brzezinski.<sup>56</sup> This was not a surprising choice, as already all foreign policy memos had to pass through Brzezinski or Carter would send them off with a hand wave and the instruction to “clear it with Zbig.”<sup>57</sup> In fact, Vaughan claims,

<sup>53</sup> Carter 51%, Ford 40%, Jones, “Gerald Ford Retrospective.”

<sup>54</sup> Carter 47%, Ford 45%, *ibid.*; “The Race: Stay Tuned,” *Newsweek*, October 4, 1976.

<sup>55</sup> “Gerald Ford Retrospective,” December 29, 2006, *Gallup*, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/23995/Gerald-Ford-Retrospective.aspx#1>.

<sup>56</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1004; Vaughan, “Helsinki Final Act,” pg. 15.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Sheer, “In Search of Brzezinski,” *Washington Post*, February 6, 1977.

Brzezinski had “assumed command” of Carter’s foreign policy by late 1975.<sup>58</sup> Carter himself noted Brzezinski was his “primary foreign affairs advisor” during the campaign, and many of Carter’s speeches either drew on drafts and outlines prepared in large part by Brzezinski or even lifted phrases liberally from Brzezinski’s own writings, a good example being Carter’s attacks on the “Nixon-Ford-Kissinger obsession with power blocs and spheres of influence.”<sup>59</sup> By attacking Ford for letting the Soviets get the best of détente and for neglecting human rights, Carter attacked “Kissinger’s worldview from both conservative and liberal angles.” Brzezinski worked on policy speeches to “juxtapose Carter’s liberal internationalism from George McGovern’s neo-isolationism, Kissinger’s amoral emphasis on balance of power diplomacy, and Ronald Reagan’s anti-détente rhetoric that rejected any form of engagement with the Soviet Union.”<sup>60</sup> In other words, Carter and his team wanted to present a “third way” with regard to Eastern Europe, a platform which would appeal to not only to liberal idealists but also to conservative cold warriors. On February 16, 1976, Richard Gardner and Brzezinski had submitted a memo to Carter arguing “the United States ought to be at least as interested in Eastern Europe as the Soviet Union is in Latin America.”<sup>61</sup>

And so Brzezinski and Carter sat down for breakfast the morning of October 5 to prepare. Carter, aware of his evaporating lead, “was not in a good mood.” The fact that the debate would be broadcast by satellite to the biggest television audience since the Apollo 11

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<sup>58</sup> Vaughan, whose work has been very influential on my own, has written a number of articles on Zbigniew Brzezinski, and has been granted exclusive access to Brzezinski’s personal files; Vaughan will also be the author of the first full, authorized biography of Zbigniew Brzezinski; Vaughan, “Helsinki Final Act,” pg. 12.

<sup>59</sup> Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), pg. 24; Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), pg. 5-7; Vaughan, “Helsinki Final Act,” pg. 12.

<sup>60</sup> Vaughan, “Political and Academic Life,” pg. 239.

<sup>61</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pg. 149-150.

moon landing lent even more pressure than usual.<sup>62</sup> In his memo to Carter, Brzezinski urged the Democratic candidate to argue “that the major issue confronting us is the absence of effective Presidential leadership,” which he felt was crucial as “only by putting Ford on the defensive could [Carter] shatter the advantage of Presidential incumbency.”<sup>63</sup> Brzezinski also provided Carter a sample answer to a likely question on Eastern Europe, which encompassed the developing strands of his Eastern Europe policy:

I reject the notion that Eastern Europe should cultivate organic links with the Soviet Union and I want to make it plain that the American interest in Eastern Europe is neither anti-Soviet nor motivated by Cold War concerns. It is derived from my longer-range view that it is in our collective interest to promote closer East-West cooperative ties, and I will use all of the resources at my disposal to patiently promote such ties. We have ways of speaking directly to the East Europeans (through the Radio), we can promote closer social and economic ties with them, we can insist that the Helsinki Agreement be scrupulously observed in all of its aspects, and we can do all of that in the context of trying to improve our relations with the Soviet Union as well.<sup>64</sup>

Anticipating such a question would pay major dividends when, about halfway through the debate, Max Frankel of the *New York Times* unwittingly uttered the most famous question of the election when he asked President Ford whether the Soviets were getting “the better of us” in détente. Speaking in defense of the Helsinki Final Accords, Ford boldly asserted, “There is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, and there never will be under a Ford Administration.” When a perplexed Frankel asked for a clarification, Ford kept digging, claiming he didn’t believe that the Yugoslavians, Romanians, and Poles “consider

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<sup>62</sup> Vaughan, “Helsinki Final Act,” pg. 11-12.

<sup>63</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pg. 9; *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1004; Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), pg. 699.

<sup>64</sup> Vaughan, “Political and Academic Life,” pg. 263.

themselves dominated by the Soviet Union.” A “delighted” Carter jumped on this opportunity and “went for Ford’s jugular,”<sup>65</sup> 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 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.<sup>66</sup>

In rapid succession, Carter had hammered Ford on his entire Eastern Europe policy point-by-point and “repeated some of his favorite campaign themes: Ford sanctioned secret diplomacy, failed to stand up to the Soviets, and yielded to pressure from those even less firm than himself.”<sup>67</sup> James Naughton of the *New York Times* reported an “audible intake of air” from the crowd, and Brent Scowcroft, watching the debate from backstage, is said to have “gone white.”<sup>68</sup> Hamilton Jordan exclaimed “He did it! Jimmy cleaned his clock!” and Mondale joked afterwards he would look for a Polish bar, as drinks would be free for Democrats.<sup>69</sup> The uproar following the second debate pushed Eastern Europe to the forefront of campaign topics.<sup>70</sup> No less than William F. Buckley Jr. called Ford’s answer “the ultimate Polish joke.”<sup>71</sup> While not admitting he had slipped up, Ford the next day asserted his administration’s regard for the right of self-determination for all peoples. At the mention of

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<sup>65</sup> Ribuffo, pg. 385.

<sup>66</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume 3, pg. 100.

<sup>67</sup> Ribuffo, pg. 386.

<sup>68</sup> Vaughan, “Helsinki Final Act,” pg. 15.

<sup>69</sup> Andrew Downer Crain, *The Ford Presidency: A History*, (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009), pg. 276; *Washington Post*, October 8, 1976 cited in Ribuffo, pg. 399.

<sup>70</sup> Of the *LA Times*, it should be noted, but only page 13 of the *New York Times*. An excellent treatment of the fallout from the second debate can be found in Mark Rozell’s *The Press and the Ford Presidency*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

<sup>71</sup> William F. Buckley, Jr., “Mr. Ford’s Polish Joke,” *National Review*, November 12, 1976, (Vol. 28 Issue 43), pg. 1252.

Eastern Europe, hecklers began booing and held up signs reading “Ford frees Poles, Carter wins polls,” and “Make up your mind, Jerry.”<sup>72</sup> For several more days, Ford would try to backtrack before finally acknowledging his slip of words. By this point the damage had been done, and many Americans of Eastern European descent such as Victor Viksnins of the Captive Nations Committee were reconsidering their votes in light of the fact that “there are no free countries in Eastern Europe and the President should be the first to know that.”<sup>73</sup>

Although Carter did gain slightly in the polls following the second debate, the Soviet domination remark hurt Ford far more than it helped Carter.<sup>74</sup> The episode caused voters to see Ford as un-presidential, clueless, and out of touch with the real world. The gaffe seemed to confirm the suspicion many had that Henry Kissinger was the foreign policy power behind the throne. George Will wrote, “It would be understandable if Ford twice spoke absurd nonsense because he had just been awakened from a deep slumber at 3 A.M. by someone shouting “Helsinki” in his ear. But Ford had known for more than a year that the Helsinki agreement, and hence the US attitude toward Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, would be a campaign issue...Henry Kissinger has custody of Ford’s mind in foreign policy matters.”<sup>75</sup> *Time* wrote Ford had made “what could well be the most damaging statement of his career.” Ford would soon regain his footing with the electorate, but in the meantime Carter would make the most of his opportunity.<sup>76</sup> For his part, Brzezinski did not want to “overplay the

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<sup>72</sup> Rudy Abramson, “President Defends Dominance Remark,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 8, 1976, pg. A1.

<sup>73</sup> Seth King, “Ethnic Groups Score Ford’s Views on Soviet Role in Eastern Europe,” *The New York Times*, October 8, 1976.

<sup>74</sup> October 8-11, Carter 48%, Ford 42%; Jeffery Jones, “Gerald Ford Retrospective,” December 29, 2006, Gallup, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/23995/Gerald-Ford-Retrospective.aspx#1>.

<sup>75</sup> George F. Will, “Tiresome Little Men Clawing for Lincoln’s Chair,” *Washington Post*, October 14, 1976.

<sup>76</sup> “The Blooper Heard Round the World,” *Time*, October 18, 1978; Jeffery Jones, “Gerald Ford Retrospective,” December 29, 2006, Gallup, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/23995/Gerald-Ford-Retrospective.aspx#1>.

subject,” writing in a memo to campaign staff that Carter should “speak more out of sorrow than anger,” and to 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. There is good language in that speech, and surfacing it again would show that he is not merely exploiting Ford’s mistake but speaking out of conviction.”<sup>77</sup>

Having gained traction in the aftermath of the second debate, Carter would keep Eastern Europe on the front burner. In an interview on October 9 with correspondents of religious periodicals, Carter was asked “Do you think that world communism is a threat to freedom in this world today?” His response was unexpected and interesting in its reasoning, if targeted to the audience in question: “Yes. There’s no doubt about it,” Carter said, citing persecution of Russian Baptists, Jews, and the division of families. He went on to highlight the persecution in countries like Poland who “have been deprived of religious freedom both in the Catholic Church hierarchy and in the worship lives of the private citizens who are not so well known.”<sup>78</sup> Although Carter’s religiosity has long become a worn trope, it is not hard to see the ease with which he could have enmeshed his deep religious convictions with his desire to see human rights upheld for the populations of the “Second World” and beyond. Not only were these goals desirable because of their alignment with American and Western traditions, but because they constituted a “moral” foreign policy. That it also served to put the Soviet Union on the defense in its own backyard could not have but helped garner support in the eyes of many voters who found the “balance” of détente unsettling. And

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<sup>77</sup> 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.

<sup>78</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 970.

although he likely amped up his criticism for crowds of Polish, Hungarian, and other Americans who sought a more aggressive US policy toward their traditional enemy, the ideas he advocated would find voice as his administration's policy.

### **Carter Outlines his Policy**

On October 10, Jimmy Carter attended a Pulaski Day dinner held by the Polish community in Chicago. This was an important constituency, especially in Chicago, where Polish-Americans were one of the most powerful ethnic lobbies. The Polish-American Congress was already the most important East European interest group by the 1950s, and although its leaders generally supported Republican candidates from whom they expected a hard line toward the Soviet Union, the rank and file voted overwhelmingly for Democrats.<sup>79</sup> Carter asked the audience to recall statements he had made in a previous visit to Chicago earlier in March. Carter reminded the crowd of his assertion that "Eastern Europe must never, and can never be a stable region until the Eastern European countries regain their independence...that any United States-Soviet détente depends upon recognizing the legitimate aspirations of the people – of Poland...and the rest of Eastern Europe." However, this was not quite what Carter had previously said in Chicago, and the difference, although slight, is revealing.<sup>80</sup>

In the March 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." In the seven months between the two speeches, instability had changed from an inherent quality to

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<sup>79</sup> Ribuffo, pg. 389.

<sup>80</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1004.

a form of pressure which should be steadily maintained. The idea that Eastern Europe *must* and *can never* be stable until it becomes independent is more subversive and would foreshadow Carter's policy toward Poland as president. If any statement was a shot across the bow of détente and, it must be noted, the Soviet Union, this was certainly it. It was here, too, that Carter made sure to note to the Polish audience that Zbigniew Brzezinski alone had prepared him for the second debate in San Francisco, highlighting the importance of his counsel.<sup>81</sup>

In this speech, Carter drew together the strands of his proposed Polish policy and presented a four-fold program which later constituted Carter's presidential policy toward Poland. Although Carter's plan treated the "Soviet bloc" as a region as Ford had done, it also hinted at a move to treat Poland and its neighbors on their own merit and not through Moscow. To this end, Carter told the Chicago Poles that while he wanted to seek cooperation with the Soviet Union rather than a cold war, he would take several firm, concrete "steps to show that we do care about freedom in Eastern Europe."<sup>82</sup>

First, Carter sought the USSR's increased compliance with the Helsinki Accord's Basket Three human rights provisions. Human rights would become a central part of US-Eastern Europe relations. Carter called for America to be "constantly concerned about the preservation of human rights throughout the world" and pledged "as President, I will do

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<sup>81</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 113.

<sup>82</sup> In this plan, three East European nations were most important: Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia. Not only were these nations strategically important but they also possessed liberal regimes compared to their neighbors; *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1004.

nothing by deed or word to give the slightest indication that we will ever accept permanent Soviet domination over countries that want to be free.”<sup>83</sup>

Second, 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.” RFE was hampered by weak transmitters, extensive Soviet jamming, and a cautious State Department. Carter aimed to increase RFE’s funding, again making the radio agency a potent force through which to pressure Eastern Europe.<sup>84</sup>

Third, the candidate pledged to work “for an expanded network of human and commercial ties” with the East, ties which would “keep the alternative of freedom always open in the Eastern European countries.” This was particularly pertinent for Poland, where business ties with the West were strongest. By expanding cultural and student exchanges, Polish scientists, intellectuals, and students would be exposed to Western ideas and experiences which they would hopefully internalize and pass on to others. Favorable trade deals, economic credits, and technological and scientific exchanges would serve as leverage with which to compel good behavior from the communist regimes of Europe.<sup>85</sup>

Finally, Carter called for bilateral relations with the nations of Eastern Europe, asserting “United States-Soviet détente depends upon recognizing the legitimate aspirations” of the Poles. Bilateral relations had developed during the early 1970s, but Kissinger had emphasized “shuttle diplomacy” with Moscow rather than the satellite capitals. Carter sought to widen and strengthen this trend. Through bilateral relations the exchanges could take

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<sup>83</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1004.

<sup>84</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1004.

<sup>85</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1004-5.

place, assuming the political atmosphere was sufficiently democratic. This would have the dual effect of making the communist countries more amenable to and more economically tied to the United States and its allies while simultaneously weaning them away from the fraternal, almost mercantilist Soviet system.<sup>86</sup>

As a whole, this would spell a major shift in relations with Eastern Europe and a rethinking of strategic priorities. And while targeted at a major swath of Eastern Europe, this policy would be applied most completely toward Poland during Carter's tenure. Although outlined late in the campaign, Carter had spoken in more detail to each of the segments in interviews, speeches, and question and answer sessions. These prongs each merit separate scrutiny.

### **Human Rights**

Human rights, the first and most often mentioned prong, would become a central factor in Carter's Polish policy, informing each of its other aspects. Human rights activists in Eastern Europe could already point to established documents such as the UN Charter, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the constitutions of the communist nations themselves, which called for a measure of human and civil rights, in theory if not in practice.<sup>87</sup> None of these documents were as influential as the Helsinki Final Accords, however. Initially cheered as a "ringing triumph for Soviet diplomacy," Helsinki was viewed skeptically by Western Europe and the United States over the course of its first year. Ford defended it as a major achievement of détente and a sign of peace, and astutely noted "History will judge this [Helsinki] Conference not by what we say here today, but by what

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<sup>86</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1005.

<sup>87</sup> Wozniuk, pg. 62.

we do tomorrow - not by the promises we make, but by the promises we keep." Many Americans were unconvinced and denounced Helsinki as a new Yalta, while others grimly noted the failure of Soviet compliance with many of its provisions.<sup>88</sup>

By more aggressively putting pressure on Warsaw and Moscow to abide by the Basket Three provisions of the Helsinki Final Accords, the United States under a Carter Administration would make clear the terms by which economic incentives would be earned. It was the classic "carrot and stick" system. More lenient treatment of political prisoners, the press, and demonstrators would open the door for "carrots," whereas crackdowns, arrests, and widespread intimidation might see the "stick." future loans in jeopardy, more hard-edged Radio Free Europe programming, and cultural, technological, and scientific exchanges curtailed. Historian Robert Byrnes noted in the March 1976 *Current History* that Helsinki "establishes a 'code of conduct' against which Communist performance can be measured." The first occasion for such an assessment would occur at the Belgrade conference, schedule to begin in late 1977.<sup>89</sup>

Human rights and Eastern Europe were integral parts of Carter's first major foreign policy address at a meeting of the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations on the "Ides" of March 15, 1976. The speech, written by Brzezinski, garnered much attention in the press and bolstered Carter's reputation in foreign affairs.<sup>90</sup> While Carter admitted that the American people had grown weary of the "military adventurism and covert manipulation" that had characterized much of the foreign relations of the decade, but he held that isolationism was

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<sup>88</sup> "Signing of the Helsinki Final Act," Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, <http://www.osce.org/who/43960>; Vaughan, "Political and Academic Life," pg. 258.

<sup>89</sup> Robert Byrnes, "The United States and East Europe," *Current History*, Vol. 70, No. 414 (March 1976), pg. 97.

<sup>90</sup> Vaughan, "Political and Academic Life," pg. 240.

not the answer.<sup>91</sup> Carter agreed with the necessity of continued détente, but argued that in its current form it was gravely skewed toward the Soviets, providing:

surface tranquility in Europe within boundaries redefined to their benefit together with support for wars of national liberation elsewhere. It is having 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.<sup>92</sup>

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 America had been so eager to sign the Helsinki accords that in haste it had gotten little in return. More provocatively, he argued that Eastern Europe was inherently unstable because of its artificial separation from Western Europe and the imposed, alien nature of the communist governments to the Poles and other Eastern Europeans.<sup>93</sup> This was a clear repudiation of the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine, which advised a mainly economic rather than political relationship *vis-à-vis* a Poland firmly within a Soviet sphere of influence.<sup>94</sup>

Three months later, Carter presented his proposals to the platform committee of the Democratic Party in New York City just before the party's nominating convention. As before, he made sure to include Eastern Europe among his foreign policy topics. With regard

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<sup>91</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 113.

<sup>92</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 116.

<sup>93</sup> Scholars including Samuel Huntington and Brzezinski differentiated between "essentially domestic" communist countries and those in which socialism was "largely imposed by foreign (i.e. Soviet) power;" 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.

<sup>94</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 116; Ribuffo, pg. 393.

to human rights, Helsinki, and Eastern Europe, the language of his proposal was almost identical to that of the Chicago speech.<sup>95</sup>

With the Democratic nomination secured after a hard-fought primary, the general campaign loomed. Carter's approach to foreign policy and human rights was catching fire and attracting attention in the press. Brzezinski's strategy was not only differentiating the candidate from his opponent but also opening up an entire arsenal of criticisms. Brzezinski keenly recognized the key opportunity created by the Helsinki Accords and West Germany's *ostpolitik*, which in settling Poland's border with Germany had removed the boogeyman of a resurgent Germany, a favorite communist tactic to gain popular support. Brzezinski felt that it was important to support the rising dissident movements which themselves served as a "confirmation" that "putting an emphasis in a positive way on the Basket III of the Helsinki Accords was a good strategy."<sup>96</sup>

Brzezinski later recalled the emphasis on Basket III gave Carter "a real opportunity to press [the Ford campaign] at the point of greater vulnerability to them, and to do it in a manner which at the same time didn't make us look as if we were just some sort of crude anti-communists interested in inflaming or re-inflaming the Cold War. Carter was killing the Soviets with kindness because he was talking about engagement, human rights, disarmament – but the Soviets knew what he was talking about – or at least they knew what *I* was talking about."<sup>97</sup> This is an important distinction to note: not all the campaign rhetoric was aimed just at American public.

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<sup>95</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 247.

<sup>96</sup> Interview of Zbigniew Brzezinski, in Vaughan, "Political and Academic Life," pg. 259.

<sup>97</sup> Interview of Zbigniew Brzezinski, in Vaughan, "Political and Academic Life," pg. 259.

Carter continued on the campaign trail with an increasingly developed foreign policy on the USSR and Eastern Europe. On July 14, Carter stressed to the press “I believe strongly that the Soviet Union and other countries should abide by the human rights commitment they made at the Helsinki Accords and elsewhere and that the United States should voice its support for such compliance,”<sup>98</sup> and on August 23 in an Interview of *L'Express* he repeated the assertion that the Soviets had “so far” not complied to the Helsinki Accords.<sup>99</sup>

Prior to the debates, Brzezinski advised Carter to refrain from criticizing the Helsinki Accords as a whole and rather call instead for Soviet compliance with the Basket Three provisions, which at the time were still relatively unknown.<sup>100</sup> The Helsinki negotiations had been held in closed-sessions, and according to human rights expert William Korey, the media neglected to dig deeply into the real meaning of the treaty. The State Department, eager to downplay a domestic “hot potato,” did not help matters either.<sup>101</sup> Like many others, Carter had initially been an opponent of the Helsinki Accords, but over time came to agree with Brzezinski’s line of thinking. Brzezinski’s debate memo to Carter clearly stated “Do not attack the Agreement as a whole:”

The so-called ‘Basket III’ gives us the right – for the first time – to insist on respect for human rights without this constituting interference in the internal affairs of communist states. 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. The Helsinki Agreement also provides for the permanence of existing borders in Europe, and this happens to be in our interest. Insecurity about borders tended to drive the East Europeans (notably the Czechs and Poles) into Soviet hands.

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<sup>98</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 693.

<sup>99</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 546.

<sup>100</sup> 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.

<sup>101</sup> William Korey, *The Promises We Keep: Human Rights, the Helsinki Process, and American Foreign Policy*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), pg. 21.

Thus, it is not in your interest to suggest that it would have been better if we had not accepted the existing borders.<sup>102</sup>

Carter's campaign speechwriter 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."<sup>103</sup> The emphasis on human rights was also influential within Eastern Europe and particularly Poland. Historian Bronislaw Geremek, a key member of the Polish opposition and Solidarity, and later Minister of Foreign Affairs, recalled Brzezinski's role as crucial in changing the debate over the perception of the Helsinki Final Act:

To say very frankly we in the Polish opposition had some serious doubts about the Helsinki process. We initially thought it was another situation where the Russians were superior negotiators to the Western politicians, as expressed by Lenin when he said the West would "produce the rope that would hang themselves." It was thus extremely important to us that Zbigniew Brzezinski was involved in the process and that he 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.<sup>104</sup>

As summer turned to fall, Jimmy Carter turned up the heat on the Ford Administration's policy toward Eastern Europe. His policy disagreements would center increasingly around the concept of human rights and the acknowledgement of Eastern Europe's aspirations for freedom. A subsequent speech to the presidents of a major Jewish

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<sup>102</sup> Vaughan, "Helsinki Final Act," pg. 14-15.

<sup>103</sup> Interview of Patrick Anderson, in Joshua Muravchik, *The Uncertain Crusade: Jimmy Carter and the Dilemmas of Human Rights Policy*, (Lanham: AEI Press, 1988), pg. 2.

<sup>104</sup> While Brzezinski was very involved in the Helsinki process from 1977-1980, he was not part of the initial Helsinki conference; Interview of Bronislaw Geremek, in Vaughan, "Helsinki Final Act," pg. 13-14.

organization in Boston on September 30 and in the October *Armed Forces Journal* carried forward this criticism of the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine and the neglect of the Basket Three provisions of the Helsinki Accords.<sup>105</sup>

The interplay between economics and human rights in East-West relations was accentuated by Congress's establishment of the US Helsinki Commission (USHC), an independent government agency to monitor Helsinki compliance.<sup>106</sup> Political scientist Sanjeev Khagram has argued that the Helsinki Commission reached "well beyond" the Jackson-Vanik amendment as a Congressional foray into foreign affairs. The commission was strongly opposed by the Ford White House, which was under heavy attack for signing the Helsinki Accords and wanted the public to forget about the matter as "yesterday's news."<sup>107</sup> During the debate in Congress about establishing the commission, the powerful Senator Clifford Case (R-NJ) argued, "Congress should be able to play an important role in the all-important area of human rights, which all too often appear to be of only secondary concern to the executive branch." Ford's gaffe in the second debate helped prevent a pocket veto of the legislation by a reluctant White House.<sup>108</sup>

Carter was again asked about Soviet domination of Eastern Europe at a conference in Kansas City, Missouri on October 16, 1976. He replied "I would recognize that it exists, but

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<sup>105</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 836, 874.

<sup>106</sup> The full title is the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), but for clarity I will hereafter use the term U.S. Helsinki Commission, Commission, or USHC. CSCE will refer to the Helsinki process, including the Belgrade review conference. The Commission, which is still active, includes nine members of the House and Senate, as well as one member each from the Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce.

<sup>107</sup> House Committee on International Relations, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *The Belgrade Followup Meeting to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: A Report and Appraisal*, Report, May 17, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., pg. 9; Sanjeev Khagram, James V. Riker, Kathryn Sikkink, *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pg. 77-78.

<sup>108</sup> Korey, pg. 33.

it ought not to exist.” Carter also repeated his “demand [for] a reassessment of the Helsinki Agreement,” and that the Soviet Union “live up to their so-called Basket Three agreements which permitted freer expression within the Eastern European” zone. Whereas previously the Basket Three provisions had been cited in a general context, now Carter gave specifics, citing freedom of speech among his grievances. In accordance with his new interlaced policy, Carter simultaneously called for the Soviets to stop their continual jamming of RFE/RL.<sup>109</sup>

Questioning on Eastern Europe and Poland became increasingly aggressive in tone. Whereas questions earlier in the campaign had centered on the effectiveness of détente, now Carter fielded questions about military intervention in Eastern Europe “in order to insure [sic] liberty.” Carter affirmatively responded that Poland is “highly dominated,” yet at the same time clarified “I wouldn’t want to make a statement about what I would do 2 or 3 or 4 or 8 years in the future if that should occur...But, I would not send American troops in, I can’t imagine us becoming involved in a war if the Polish or East German people decided they wanted to be free.”<sup>110</sup> Carter sought change in Eastern Europe and expanded human rights, to be sure, but not at the expense of open conflict, Soviet invasion, or thermonuclear war.

### **Radio Free Europe**

Second, Carter would call attention to the role of Radio Free Europe, which was highly respected in Poland as one of the only credible, independent sources of news and programming. The Voice of America, BBC, and for some, West German television and radio, were its only peers. The opposition listened openly and the party clandestinely, RFE

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<sup>109</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1021-23.

<sup>110</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1024.

wielded a power in Poland that the domestic news organs envied. At the meeting of Chicago Poles, Carter stressed the Poles and other East Europeans “must recognize that no matter how destitute they may be of freedom at this moment, the legitimate hope through access beyond the Iron Curtain, is always open to them.”<sup>111</sup>

This could be achieved through the “most valuable instruments our nation has for this purpose,” the international radio stations of Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe (RFE), and Radio Liberty (RL). Although they often work closely together and even in concert, the radio stations have slightly different purposes. Voice of America served as the official radio voice of the US government abroad, and its broadcasts primarily consisted of news, culture, and American music, particularly jazz. Radio Free Europe functioned to transmit news and commentary to the nations of Eastern Europe, and its broadcasts were more likely to contain criticism of the USSR and its client states. This made it widely popular and an underground staple. Radio Liberty was tasked with programming beamed into the Soviet Union, and was organized along similar lines to its more famous counterpart. Carter correctly asserted during the campaign that particularly for those in Eastern Europe and the USSR, “radio broadcasts from abroad are the primary source of uncensored information.” In part because of the similar work performed by RFE and RL, the two organizations merged in 1976.<sup>112</sup>

But by 1976, the radio organizations had lost much of their previous luster. 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

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<sup>111</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1004; Robert Byrnes, “The United States and East Europe,” *Current History*, Vol. 70, No. 414 (March 1976), pg. 100.

<sup>112</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 694.

services. Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty suffered from similar restrictions. Carter and Brzezinski felt that the State Department had become far too sensitive to Soviet protestations, and as a result had severely reduced the effectiveness of the radio broadcasts. 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.”<sup>113</sup>

Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty had enjoyed Soviet jamming from day one, although investments in technology such as more towers and stronger transmitting equipment had largely kept the radio services one step ahead of Soviet interference. RFE did not operate without incident, however. Many charged that RFE’s broadcasts had incited the Hungarians to revolution and subsequent slaughter in 1956, an episode which thereafter seared the radio station’s staff with a hesitant streak. When, in 1972, it was also disclosed that RFE had been funded by the CIA since its inception, popular uproar found voice in the Congress, which placed the station under the new Board for International Broadcasting (BIB) which would receive direct funding from Congress and provide additional oversight into RFE’s activities. The radios had many friends but also many detractors, among them powerful senators such as William Fulbright and Frank Church. At the same time, funds for new technology and stronger transmitters dried up and jamming slowly pulled the broadcasts under a hissing torrent of static.<sup>114</sup>

Carter’s position paper on the radio agencies asserted that the Ford Administration had failed to “appreciate the importance of an open foreign policy and a free flow of

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<sup>113</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 694.

<sup>114</sup> Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), pg. 196, 206.

information and ideas through mass communication.” Also decried was the State Department’s preference to “deal privately” with Moscow while the USSR “launched a massive diplomatic attack on the radios” in order to prevent them from covering the upcoming Olympic games, to say nothing of the day to day activities of the entire Warsaw Pact.<sup>115</sup> In contrast, Carter sought revitalization and expansion of RFE and the other radio agencies to restore them to their former status. “If détente with the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe is to have real meaning,” Carter charged, “we must work toward a freer flow of information and ideas for those countries.”<sup>116</sup>

The expansion of the radio services served as an example of the best possibilities of Carter’s human rights-centric philosophy. The campaign’s position paper on VOA and RFE/RL put forth plainly the promise and purpose of these agencies:

The radios are more than mere transmitters of information. They are the symbol of the US 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 peoples of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe... will transcend what Alexandr Solzhenitsyn has called the ‘muffled zone.’ And 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.<sup>117</sup>

In a remarkable, succinct fashion, the brief turned the conventional wisdom on its head, recasting Radio Free Europe as not folly but a clarion voice of reason and symbol of the new transparent government. The paper appealed to classic American values while at the same time throwing down a major intellectual gauntlet. For RFE not only to function as a

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<sup>115</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 694.

<sup>116</sup> Besides the American stations, only BBC or perhaps West German television and radio (if one were close enough to pick up the signal) were available. These were the only free and independent source for news, more reliable by far than the domestic news organs; *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 694.

<sup>117</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 694.

surrogate press but also to signal engagement in Eastern Europe and “commitment to peaceful change” was as direct an assault on the Yalta-Helsinki “status quo” as one can imagine short of evil empire. The radios symbolized a break with the past and a rejuvenated future, all grounded in traditional American values.

It is not hard to see the hand of Zbigniew Brzezinski in this formulation. Brzezinski had as early as 1961 coauthored an article for *Foreign Affairs* with Bill Griffith defending the radio broadcasts into Eastern Europe.<sup>118</sup> Griffith had served as an advisor to RFE in Munich. Considering that Carter often leaned on Brzezinski as a one-man foreign policy team, the origin of the radio service policy becomes apparent.<sup>119</sup>

### **Economic and Cultural Ties**

The third prong of Carter’s policy would be to encourage the existing economic and cultural ties to Poland. Foremost among these was trade, which by 1976 saw Poland exporting \$1 billion to the West and importing \$500 million in goods. US-Polish relations were also marked by an array of cultural, scientific, and technological exchanges. The Poles welcomed the opportunity for investment and training, while the United States made every effort to expose Poland to the Western way of life.<sup>120</sup>

Carter signaled his support for carrying forward economic ties with the USSR and Eastern Europe early in the campaign at the meeting of the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations on March 15, 1976. The economic relationship between the two nations had quickly grown in the 1970s, and Carter supported this trend on the grounds that “every

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<sup>118</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski and William Griffith, "Peaceful Engagement in Eastern Europe," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Spring 1961); Presidential Campaign 1976, Volume One, Part One, pg. 647.

<sup>119</sup> Vaughan, "Political And Academic Life, pg. 14, 45, 60.

<sup>120</sup> CIA Report, "Soviet and East European Relations with the US and the West," November 1, 1976, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 1.

nation's economy benefits from expanding two-way trade."<sup>121</sup> Carter spoke to the Foreign Policy Association in New York on June 23, 1976, calling for "growing cooperation" among the United States, Western Europe, and Japan, a concept influenced by his time with the Trilateral Commission which Brzezinski directed. Carter argued this would help soothe "international tensions, food shortages, overpopulation, poverty, the arms race, and allocation of resources." Poland was a prime location for such cooperation, an example of which would come just two days after Carter's speech.<sup>122</sup>

In the 1970s, Poland was exhibiting the structural problems that plagued the Soviet bloc economies as a whole. Poles paid far less for their food than it cost to produce, much to the chagrin of farmers who were underpaid and to the government which had to shoulder the low-price subsidies. The Polish government announced on June 25, 1976 that it would raise food prices, despite the fact that a similar rise had caused serious riots in 1970.<sup>123</sup> Although Eastern Europe had experienced frequent uprisings since 1945, Poland's periods of unrest were unique in that they had always been in response to economic stimuli. A government spokesman stated in connection to the price increases, "We don't expect applause, but we do expect people's understanding." Calls for calm did little, as workers in the Ursus tractor factory in Warsaw began to dismantle the railway that connected Warsaw to Moscow, raising the specter of military, political, and economic disruption. Other workers began to strike and confront local authorities, which brought a repeal of the price increases within a day. This was much faster than in 1970, when it had taken two months to reset the prices. Like 1970,

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<sup>121</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 113.

<sup>122</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 266.

<sup>123</sup> 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.

however, Polish security services poured into the areas of unrest and quickly reasserted control, beating workers and arresting others, even in areas not affected by the strikes.<sup>124</sup>

This rioting that caused the development of the Worker's Defense Committee (KOR), which was formed to provide legal and financial assistance to workers who had been detained or fired. KOR also sought to publicize police brutality against dissidents.<sup>125</sup> As the clamor of the unrest and the subsequent trials and protests died down, Carter prepared to attend his party delegates, where for the first time in years a nominee was apparent before the party elders had a chance to vote. Over the same period of time, Carter's Eastern European policy was maturing.

At a conference in Kansas City, Missouri on October 16, 1976, Carter expressed his desire to "make available at every opportunity trade opportunities – tourist exchange, student exchange, cultural exchanges – with Eastern European countries."<sup>126</sup> By stressing not only direct trade but also the exchanges, Carter argued that the United States would benefit more from détente than it had under Ford. Ideas would now be a primary American export along with technology and grain. At the same time, trade and the transfer of American ideas would signal support for workers' political goals. The Soviet Union was eager to gain Western scientific and technological know-how, but it viewed cultural exchanges much more soberly. Robert Byrnes wrote in March 1976 that East European governments "seek a fire that will

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<sup>124</sup> "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.

<sup>125</sup> Adam Michnik, a key figure in KOR and Solidarity, wrote "I remember attending a trial in 1976 that implicated some Ursus workers. I heard the condemnations, I saw the wives crying, and I shook with rage. I felt that it would be inadmissible to drop these people. And I started writing a protest letter on the part of the intellectuals right after," Adam Michnik, *Letters From Freedom: Post-Cold War Realities and Perspectives*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pg. 53.

<sup>126</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1021.

not burn. They seek information, but not ideas. They want to borrow technology, but not the culture that produced the technology.”<sup>127</sup>

With this tension in mind, Carter returned to the now familiar charge that America had gotten very little in return for signing the Helsinki Accords. In his infamous November 1976 *Playboy* interview, Carter criticized the Ford Administration’s purely economic focus on Poland, and its indifference to the human rights situation.<sup>128</sup>

At a meeting of the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations on March 15, 1976, Carter had argued, “The core of détente is the reduction of arms,” signaling the central place SALT would still occupy in US strategic thinking. However, to pursue such ends, Carter argued that America needed to be willing to pursue “hard bargaining” with the Soviet Union. This hard bargaining would not be limited only to seeking deeper cuts in weapon stocks. Carter felt “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,” and in contrast to the view of proponents of the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine:

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...I deplore the recent infliction upon Poland of a constitution which ratifies its status as a Soviet satellite. We must reiterate to the Soviets that an enduring American-Soviet détente cannot ignore the legitimate aspirations of other nations.<sup>129</sup>

An important part of this process would involve increased contacts between Poland and the United States.

### **Bilateral Relations**

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<sup>127</sup> Robert Byrnes, “The United States and East Europe,” *Current History*, Vol. 70, No. 414 (March 1976), pg. 100.

<sup>128</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 953-5.

<sup>129</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 117.

Communist countries could gain access to US agricultural exports and scientific know-how through the fourth prong of Carter's Eastern Europe policy: direct bilateral relations between the United States and the East European countries. That is, Carter did not want to communicate with Warsaw via Moscow. Eastern European countries would be treated as independent powers, implicitly questioning the validity of the Soviet sphere of influence.<sup>130</sup> Poland's First Secretary Gierek welcomed this because of the prestige that it would bring not only Poland but himself as its leader. His position would be greatly bolstered by a flood of credits and exchanges to bolster Poland's economy, create jobs, and ease the burden of maintaining artificially high wages and low consumer goods prices. The liberalizing pressure he could certainly do without, but the more independence for Poland, the better. Indeed, Yugoslavia's Tito was popular in Poland for successfully charting an alternative path to socialism, and although few would publicly state it, it is not inconceivable that the managerial Gierek would have secretly desired a similar fate for himself and Poland.

Certainly Carter, if elected, wanted to encourage such developments. 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. Those are some of the things that I think could be done with effectiveness."<sup>131</sup> By shifting from negotiations *about* Eastern Europe via Moscow to a direct dialogue with Poland, Hungary, and the other nations in the

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<sup>130</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part One, pg. 116.

<sup>131</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1021.

region, the United States would be able to quickly and directly reward regimes that liberalized and improved their records on human rights.

Carter's early criticism of the Helsinki Accords had been based on what he saw as its freezing of the political *status quo* in Europe; this had been reinforced with the revelation of the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine. Carter charged at a September 8 B'nai B'rith convention that the Ford Administration "with the Sonnenfeldt statement, has shown a lack of sensitivity to the craving of the Eastern European people for greater independence. That is unacceptable...since that elaborate signing ceremony in [Helsinki] Finland, the Russians have all but ignored their pledge – and the Ford Administration has looked the other way."<sup>132</sup> Speeches such as this gained Carter support among the fiercely nationalistic and hawkish Polish and East European constituencies.

The next week, Carter carried forward the narrative in the September 13 *US News & World Report*, indirectly but roundly panning Ford for giving the Soviets a "very great diplomatic achievement" in promising "not to interfere in their control over Eastern Europe" not only through Helsinki but also through the actions of the State Department. He also hinted at an early form of "linkage," arguing the United States deserved a "*quid pro quo*" in return for the significant food, electronics, and machinery sales and the ongoing scientific and technical exchanges. Carter fervently stressed that in ceding the moral high ground for "signatures" (such as the Helsinki Accords), America had given up too much for too little gain.<sup>133</sup> In the September 20 *Business Week*, Carter asserted that trade negotiations, including

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<sup>132</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 711.

<sup>133</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 742.

those with the Soviets, should strive to “obtain diplomatic concessions.”<sup>134</sup> Stronger bilateral relations with Poland and the other nations of Eastern Europe would ease these concerns considerably. With the ability to reward or punish regimes directly, Washington would gain leverage it would never have if it continued to deal with Eastern Europe exclusively through Moscow.

### **Conclusion**

At the Vice-Presidential debate in Houston on October 16, Walter Mondale hammered his opponent Robert Dole on Ford’s remarks from the second debate, which he noted had been widely praised the government press in Poland for giving validating Communist rule in Poland. When asked what would distinguish a Carter Administration’s policies in Eastern Europe from the Ford Administration, Mondale reaffirmed the desire to deal with each country individually and not through the Soviet Union. Mondale also vowed “to identify with their aspirations for national independence, not because we are under any illusion about how easy it would be for them to become independent, but because it’s important for us to identify with the aspirations of all people around the world for those same objectives.”<sup>135</sup> As Carter had done, Mondale turned human rights and bilateral relations into sides of the same coin.

Mondale also stressed the need for the enforcement of Basket Three provisions allowing for the movement of people and informal contacts with the West, as well as the need to champion human rights activists such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn, “who stand as symbols of the human spirit’s ability to stand up to police oppression.” Dole’s saccharine

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<sup>134</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 799.

<sup>135</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume Three, pg. 168-9.

rebuttal that the hearts of the Poles and other Eastern Europeans “have never been dominated” and that “they’re good customers” seemed sterile by comparison, as was his assertion that the way to let them “know of our concern is by trade.” Dole also leaned on traditional Republican criticism of Yalta to blunt Mondale’s argument, charging that it was Roosevelt and Truman who had allowed “the enslavement of Eastern Europe.” While it was not apparent at the time, Dole’s note of the “favorable” balance of trade with Eastern Europe hinted at the problems to come, as the region had that same year exported a half billion dollars in goods while importing double that amount from the West. This trade imbalance would soon have severe ramifications for Poland’s economic stability.<sup>136</sup>

The final appearance of Poland and Eastern Europe in the published campaign literature came in an appearance in Columbus, Ohio on October 16. Carter again criticized Ford for his waffling on the “Soviet domination” quote for days after the debate, detailing his opinion that Ford had in fact not misspoken but instead had expressed a belief he had held “as long as 15 or 20 years.” Carter expressed his dismay at the physical and metaphorical division of Europe, half of which was not only cut off from the West but the knowledge that United States recognized their plight was a “place where they can trade... where Radio Free Europe can talk to them, and Radio Liberty, and where an enforcement of the Helsinki Agreement can be assured.” In his final appeal before the election, Carter again employed Brzezinski’s strategy and called for a president who would respect Eastern Europe and give it due attention, arguing, “We’ve not had that kind of leadership in recent days, in recent weeks, in recent months, but it must be restored, and if I am elected in November, and I

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<sup>136</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume Three, pg. 168-9; for the evolution of thinking toward Yalta, see Sheldon Anderson, *Condemned to Repeat It: "Lessons of History" and the Making of U.S. Cold War Containment Policy*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), pg. 98.

intend to be, next January, we will once again be a beacon light for human rights throughout the world, and you can depend on that.”<sup>137</sup> By casting a vote for his presidency, Carter argued, one was in effect casting a vote for the possibility of a Europe free and undivided, for America to once again take its place as the “shining city on the hill,” and this time the light shone on Warsaw, too. And like so many other parts of Carter’s policy, the focus on leadership as a major theme was suggested by Zbigniew Brzezinski.<sup>138</sup>

The 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, and accordingly Poland. An outline for action was sketched that would be translated directly into policy toward Poland during the incoming Carter Administration. In contrast to his predecessors, Carter would see Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe, as a variable rather than a fixed value, able to shape its own destiny and course, however slowly and tentatively. An important part of this policy would be the radio services, particularly Radio Free Europe, which would soon come to be an even more vital part of the daily life of the political underground in Poland than the radio service had been before or since. The issue of the radio services in particular would bear the imprint of Zbigniew Brzezinski; Polish policy was his brainchild throughout the Carter Administration. Although each tenet (Basket Three enforcement, RFE/RL expansion, encouragement of economic/cultural ties, bilateral ties) was not pursued simultaneously, equally, or successfully, between them they constituted the major themes of the next four years of US-Polish relations. And unbeknownst to Jimmy Carter, he would not have to wait eight years to receive his response from the Polish people.

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<sup>137</sup> *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, pg. 1043.

<sup>138</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pg. 9.

## **Chapter Two: “All the rest is just literature” – Poland Changes the Rules**

In 1976, while Americans were focused on the presidential campaign, important changes were taking place thousands of miles away in Poland. While Jimmy Carter was battling Gerald Ford for control of the White House and, in his view, setting a new course for America, Polish government officials and economists were struggling to strengthen their country's lethargic economy and stabilize its society. This chapter will examine the June 1976 riots in Poland and their aftermath, which forged the nexus of the tripartite dissident movement of workers, intellectuals, and the Catholic Church. Gierek would deal with this advent carefully, seeking to placate both the opposition and the Soviet Union, which watched developments in Poland warily. Gierek hoped to make his own rules and react on his terms. This was especially true as developments across the Eastern Bloc made it clear that dissidence would be a wide, persistent problem.

### **“...and then all hell broke loose:” the June 1976 riots**

Modern history is littered with uprisings which can trace their roots to food riots and shortages. This was true of late Cold War Poland, which although once known as a breadbasket nation, struggled to produce enough to feed its population. In an attempt to compensate for the twin pressures of cheap, government-subsidized food prices and four consecutive poor harvests, the Polish government announced price hikes in June 1976 along with a price freeze for a period of five years. This touched off a firestorm of domestic protest across Poland. Jack Seymour, then the Political Officer in the US Embassy in Warsaw, gave

perhaps the best, and most blunt, summation: “they went for the big one and then all hell broke loose.”<sup>139</sup>

The government had learned from bitter experience to unveil its new price increases while many workers were away on summer vacation and not planning for a major holiday as they had been in 1970, but the price hikes this time were far more severe: “vegetables and poultry would rise 30 percent; butter and cheese, 60 percent; meat, 70 percent; and sugar, 100 percent.” The average family would need to spend 39% more on food to maintain its current diet – an impossibility for most. Historian Anthony Kemp-Welch’s comment is apt: “[when] the employer is also the state...the distinction between an ‘economic’ grievance against an employer and a ‘political’ demand of the state is thus narrowed, if not obliterated.”<sup>140</sup>

Unlike Hungary or Czechoslovakia, where unrest had been spearheaded by intellectuals, Poland’s workers had always served as the spark of the most potent unrest, and as if on cue Ursus (a suburb of Warsaw), Radom, and Plock saw serious demonstrations and street fighting. In Radom, the party headquarters was marched on by 20,000 protesters and ransacked. In Ursus, workers from the major tractor factory there tore up a nearby railroad junction – part of the Paris-Moscow line which was central to military and logistics planning for the Warsaw Pact. Although Gierek quickly cancelled the planned price increases, the ZOMO paramilitary riot police was given “permission to brutalize residents in cities where

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<sup>139</sup> “The Month in Review,” *Current History*, Vol. 71, No. 418 (July/August 1976), pg. 42; Interview with Jack Seymour, [Frontline Diplomacy](#).

<sup>140</sup> Polish officials had announced similar price hikes two weeks before Christmas 1970, which was an important season for Poles culturally and marked by large meals with family and friends. The price hikes created an important series of civil disturbances, particularly in Gdansk and the Baltic coast; Michael D. Kennedy, *Professionals, Power, and Solidarity in Poland: A critical sociology of Soviet-type society*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pg. 40; Anthony Kemp-Welch, ed., *The Birth of Solidarity: The Gdansk Negotiations, 1980*, (New York: MacMillan, 1983), pg. 25, cited in John Rensenbrink, *Poland Challenges a Divided World*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), pg. 56; Zirakzadeh, pg. 86.

the violent protests occurred,” according to political scientist Ernesto Zirkzadeh. Many protesters were thrown into jail, where many would remain for almost a year.



Figure 2: Map of Poland<sup>141</sup>

### Poland's economic woes

Poland's economic crisis had its roots over a decade prior. Taking advantage of the opportunities détente had provided, the East Europeans decided in the 1960s (and the Poles especially in the 1970s) to “import sophisticated machinery and equipment from the West to attack problems of slow growth, low labor productivity and decreasing additions to the labor force,” according to a November 1976 CIA report.<sup>142</sup> While the Warsaw Pact benefited from the high-technology and increased production capacity, the Communist economies were not able to produce either the quantity or quality of products needed to tap into Western markets

<sup>141</sup> Plock is between Warsaw and Toruń; Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pg. 125.

<sup>142</sup> CIA Report, “Soviet and East European Relations with the US and the West,” November 1, 1976, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 7.

on a large scale. The rapid, amazing growth of the early 1970s had been built on massive imports of Western technology, but following the Arab oil embargo and the subsequent economic downturn it was simply not possible to import enough to maintain Poland's boom.<sup>143</sup>

Stanley Glod, a member of Ford's Presidential Advisory Committee for Trade Negotiations, detailed the rapid expansion of U.S.-Polish trade – which had grown from \$300,000 a year in 1972 to \$1 billion in 1976, and was expected to double by 1980. Poland was the largest market for American commerce in Eastern Europe. During the same period, the Polish economy had grown at an average of 12% per year, which Glod noted was faster than the growth of Japan or Brazil. But by 1974 and 1975, Eastern Europe began to develop record trade deficits “strongly affected by the Western recession and inflation,” according to a January 1976 report by the CIA's Office of Economic Research. By 1976, Poland held over half of Eastern Europe's debt.<sup>144</sup>

Many banks were unwilling or unable to lend Poland any more funds, and the country “clearly encountered serious difficulties in meeting its 1976 financing,” according to the CIA Economic Intelligence Weekly. More seriously, the report estimated that Poland's hard currency debt had reached \$10 billion by 1976, five times the amount just three years prior and one hundred times that of 1971. CIA estimates had Poland's debt climbing to \$13 billion by 1977. As a result, the report anticipated Poland would seek an increase in its credits from

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<sup>143</sup> Intelligence Memorandum (RP 77-10020), “World Trends and Developments,” February 1977, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 26.

<sup>144</sup> CIA Research Aid (ER76-10015), “Recent Developments in Soviet Currency Trade,” January 1976, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 1; CIA Economic Intelligence Weekly Report, March 2, 1977, NLC-31-24-2-1-8, RAC Files, Jimmy Carter Library; “Urge Poland's USA Business and Trade Handled by Pol-Ams,” *Polish American Journal*, Volume 65, Issue 10 (October 1976), pg. 3.

the United States, West Germany or France. Knowing economic instability could easily turn into political unrest, Moscow floated Poland “substantial loans” and “additional quantities of oil and grain to help Gierek out of his political and economic bind.” But the Soviets’ own economic difficulties meant that securing further aid from Moscow would be very difficult.<sup>145</sup>

According to the CIA, Poland, “needing extraordinary imports of grain and fodder,” would over the next ten years “intensify its efforts to secure additional Western financing as well as viable export markets in the West.” Faced with few options, Poland had to borrow to pay its debts. With economic credits from the West drying up and with Soviet deliveries scaled back, “Economic disarray appeared everywhere. Dilapidated machinery led to idle factories because normally imported replacement parts were unavailable. Even the well-paid working class could not easily find food or simple household staples, such as matches or soap.” There seemed no way out of economic morass or the dependence upon external loans and credits to stay afloat. Worse, Poland and its neighbors were dependent upon the West “not only for high quality industrial materials unavailable elsewhere such as special steels, synthetics, and plastics, but also for grain, oil, and metals formerly supplied by the USSR.” Just a few years after its amazing economic boom, Poland “was now entering the worst economic disaster suffered by any European country for over thirty years.”<sup>146</sup> With no way to

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<sup>145</sup> CIA Economic Intelligence Weekly Report, March 2, 1977, NLC-31-24-2-1-8, RAC Files, Jimmy Carter Library; CIA Report, “Soviet and East European Relations with the US and the West,” November 1, 1976, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 15, 22; Intelligence Memorandum (RP 77-10020), “World Trends and Developments,” February 1977, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 4, 24; CIA Research Aid (ER76-10015), “Recent Developments in Soviet Currency Trade,” January 1976, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 10.

<sup>146</sup> CIA Report, “Soviet and East European Relations with the US and the West,” November 1, 1976, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 7; Zirakzadeh, pg. 87.

repay its titanic financial obligations, Poland was in a state of economic crisis on the eve of the American presidential election in 1976.

### **RFE plays with fire**

Because of its popularity among Poles and its transmission of often politically unpalatable programming, RFE was an important part of Polish life. Bronislaw Geremek later stated in an interview that without RFE, “I couldn’t imagine the evolution of Poland in the ‘70s. I couldn’t imagine the appearance of a democratic opposition or the underground publications.” He said that its broadcasts created a kind of “political thinking – that as the difference between Poland and other countries in the region.”<sup>147</sup> Owing to this, Radio Free Europe had long frustrated Polish leaders, and this tendency was in full effect during the June 1976 riots. US Ambassador to Poland Richard Davies cabled Washington on July 6, 1976, reporting a conversation with Edward Gierek in which the Communist leader argued that Western media was sympathetic toward the measures taken by the Polish government “except for the tomfoolery of Radio Free Europe, which willfully distorts the situation.” Failure to achieve economic reform, Gierek explained, would only weaken Poland. Davies responded by stating his government desired stability and growth in Poland and reminding the party boss “we had proven this by the economic collaboration and credits we had offered.” Gierek expressed fear of enemies who wished to keep Poland weak and deprive it of the ability to have a powerful voice in Europe, and fumed, “RFE stupidly plays into the hands of those enemies.” Davies noted in his comments to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger that Gierek:

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<sup>147</sup> Vaughan, “Political and Academic Life,” pg. 213.

finds it incomprehensible that a radio station financed by the US Government and ostensibly governed by a board appointed in part by the President, should broadcast anything not carefully calculated in advance by that government for the impact it will have on its audience...Gierek appeared to be suggesting that, if he fails and is replaced by somebody else – presumably somebody hand-picked by the Soviets – we ourselves will be partially to blame because of the destructive effect of RFE’s broadcasting.<sup>148</sup>

Davies felt Gierek’s reaction to RFE was “understandable.” RFE, as David Halberstam once noted, was “the one thing in their society that [the Communist countries] can’t control in any way.”<sup>149</sup> Despite the strain brought on by extensive coverage of the American bicentennial, “based on what we have been able to hear and on the first shipment of scripts from Munich [where RFE was based],” Davies wrote, “we cannot see that RFE has grossly exceeded its guidelines...the first problem for the department is to determine what RFE has said and to evaluate its degree of consistency with US policy.”<sup>150</sup> Davies thought RFE was just doing its job.

The State Department took a close interest in RFE’s activities. Diplomats in East European embassies listened in on broadcasts and discussed them with “regime officials, local journalists, and members of the democratic opposition.” Accordingly, sometimes the Department and RFE were at odds. As Arch Puddington, deputy director of RFE/RL’s New York bureau wrote, the “State Department generally supported Gierek’s policies and was intent on solidifying relations with Poland.” On the other hand, the RFE staff, many of

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<sup>148</sup> Richard Davies to Henry Kissinger, July 6, 1976, document 55, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Volume E–15, Part 1, Documents on Eastern Europe, 1973–1976, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p1/d55>.

<sup>149</sup> Puddington, pg. 206.

<sup>150</sup> Richard Davies to Henry Kissinger, July 6, 1976, document 56, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Volume E–15, Part 1, Documents on Eastern Europe, 1973–1976, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p1/d56>.

whom were émigrés, had fiercely anti-Soviet and anti-Communist viewpoints. The RFE Polish desk viewed Gierek's reforms with cynicism, seeing them as hollow attempts to secure economic concessions from the West. Gierek, they said, was a "charlatan."<sup>151</sup>

Still, it did not take RFE broadcasts to stir the resentment and disillusionment deepening among the Polish populace. This is important when considering the mindset of American policymakers, who did not fail to notice the growing nexus of economic and political pressure within the Warsaw Pact's linchpin. Poland had always been a peculiar member of the Warsaw Pact, exhibiting, as a 1977 CIA report noted, unusual cultural homogeneity, a largely private agricultural sector with over 80% of the arable land in the hands of small private farmers, a powerful Catholic Church, and a private "enterprise sector that is growing in importance."<sup>152</sup> These unique circumstances made an easy resolution of Poland's considerable economic difficulties far less likely.

### **KOR**

The Workers' Defense Committee, or KOR, formed in the aftermath of the June riots to advocate for the jailed prisoners and their families. Leader and historian Adam Michnik's idea of "New Evolutionism" called for the opposition to address itself to the "public at large – above all, the working class....Without doubt, the power elite fear this social group most." Each segment of Polish society had extracted concessions in the past: the Polish farmers had spontaneously de-collectivized in 1956, worker protests had forced concessions in 1970, intellectuals and writers had worked to lessen censorship rules, and the Catholic Church had

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<sup>151</sup> Interview with Gifford Malone, *Frontline Diplomacy*; Puddington, pg. 212, 255-256.

<sup>152</sup> Intelligence Memorandum (RP 77-10020), "World Trends and Developments," February 1977, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 26; House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *U.S. Policy Toward Eastern Europe*, Hearing, September 7 and 12, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1978, pg. 15.

jealously guarded its semi-autonomous sphere of influence. Increasingly, their interdependence had become “an essential feature of our social reality,” according to Jacek Kuron, an influential KOR leader.<sup>153</sup>

As RFE reported, Michnik wrote that what he called the democratic opposition should “first set out clearly its own political objectives so that it can make compromises only on this basis...participate systematically and continually in public life,” and propose specific policy prescriptions. “All the rest,” Michnik wrote, “is just literature.”<sup>154</sup> It is important to remember that Michnik and Kuron saw themselves as socialists and reformers as much as democrats. This created the conditions for a tense political situation with the USSR as well. Michnik knew that “the Soviet military and political presence in Poland is the factor that determines the limits of possible evolution, and this is unlikely to change for some time.” On the other hand, both Moscow and Warsaw admitted that Poland needed Western credits. Tad Szulc, writing in *Foreign Policy*, correctly noted, “even Moscow realizes that for basic economic reasons...links with the West cannot be severed.”<sup>155</sup> Because of this, Soviet and Polish officials were nervous even before Carter had taken office. A severe crackdown in Poland might jeopardize the economic benefits they enjoyed under détente.

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<sup>153</sup> Reports generated by Radio Free Europe Research are regularly cited in this thesis, and fall under one of two categories: situation reports and background reports. Situation reports give a regular digest on major political events and noteworthy social discussions in each country of Eastern Europe. Background reports typically look at long term trends on a specific country, topic, or even the region as a whole. Similarly, CIA reports and intelligence memorandum are also regularly cited. When available, the department responsible for the generation of the report is listed in the text, but not all indicate an originating group or department; Situation Report Poland/29, December 13, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research,” pg. 9; Anthony Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism: A Cold War History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pg. 204; Kennedy, pg. 41.

<sup>154</sup> Situation Report Poland/12, May 11, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research, 2:3, March-April 1977,” pg. 5-6.

<sup>155</sup> Tad Szulc, “Living With Dissent,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 31 (Summer 1978), pg. 181.

The US embassy in Warsaw was interested in this emergence of dissident groups in Eastern Europe, some of which were “quite nationalistic,” such as in Poland. Political officer Jack Seymour explained: “we in the Embassy were getting a sense of the depth of opposition. The whole diplomatic community was abuzz watching all this going on, and, comparing notes, we tried to work out what it all meant and where it might lead.” The intelligence and foreign services were burning with the question, “when would all these groups get together? If they were ever to coalesce, we came to believe, then the regime and the system would be in real trouble.”<sup>156</sup>

Within KOR, some called for new tactics. To Michnik, the Catholic Church would be “an essential element” in this alliance. Michnik saw allies of convenience among the moderates within the government who would see compromise with the opposition as more effective than a brutal repression.<sup>157</sup> By the time Jimmy Carter took office, Warsaw’s violent unrest had subsided into a subdued (if politically active) opposition, and according to the CIA, “Gierek’s position [had] been strengthened by the Soviets, who...went out of their way to make clear that, the problems of Poland notwithstanding, Gierek is still in Moscow’s good graces.”<sup>158</sup>

One variable in the fluid, unstable social and political situation in Poland was the Catholic Church, and particularly the potential role of Cardinal Wyszynski, Primate of Poland. Wyszynski and the support of the Church were courted by both the government and

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<sup>156</sup> Situation Report Poland/12, May 11, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research, 2:3, March-April 1977,” pg. 4; Interview with Jack Seymour, Frontline Diplomacy.

<sup>157</sup> Situation Report Poland/12, May 11, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research, 2:3, March-April 1977,” pg. 5.

<sup>158</sup> Intelligence Memorandum (RP 77-10020), “World Trends and Developments,” February 1977, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 26.

the burgeoning opposition. In his Christmas 1976 sermon, the Cardinal declared “the Church must defend basic rights and see that social justice is done.” However, he cautioned that foreign observers should not conclude that the Church had “started a sort of struggle against the system,” and warned the press not to see political intent behind every action of the Church. RFE noted:

It is difficult to say what will happen, because [both the Polish government and the opposition] are entangled in a vicious fabric of principles and ambitions. There is, on one side, the authority of a state which openly proclaims the principle of dictatorship, and on the other side, a handful of people whose strength cannot be measured by the number of police truncheons at their disposal, but can be formidable if measured by moral support from more than one social stratum. Along with the Church, they have been accused of lying, and the charge was made from the high rostrum of the Sejm, formally the highest state authority. On the other hand, both the Church and the Committee for the Defense of the Workers (KOR), supported by an unorganized army of uncorrupted citizens, have challenged this highest authority by pointing the finger at its representatives...The result is an impasse, a stalemate. For how long?<sup>159</sup>

### **Peaceful engagement, competition, and the “last things”**

The members of the incoming Carter Administration differed from their predecessors in their conception of the United States’ role vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. As had the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Administrations, Carter and his foreign policy staff saw cultural competition and “peaceful engagement” as integral parts of their policy toward Poland. At the same time, economic development and trade were not discounted, and were seen as means to facilitate cultural contact and exposure to Western ideas. This was a key difference: whereas Nixon and Ford had sought trade for economic growth and to stabilize a rocky situation in Poland as elaborated in the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine.

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<sup>159</sup> Situation Report Poland/29, December 13, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research,” pg. 9; Situation Report Poland/1, January 14, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research Vol. 2, No. 1,” pg. 14.

But Carter and Brzezinski, if they did not want to dangerously destabilize Poland, wanted to shake up the status quo and see the development of democratic forces. If Poland could be weaned away from Moscow and toward the West, it would be ever more vulnerable to American leverage. Trade also allowed opportunities for cultural contact, which would in itself spur the development of political civil society in Poland.<sup>160</sup>

While Carter wanted to avoid overly aggressive or hostile measures in Eastern Europe, his Administration worried less about upsetting the Soviet Union than had its predecessor. This was, in part, symptomatic of the changing international situation. Under détente, there had been a “shift in emphasis from the political to the economic arena,” which had “economized” Western relations with the Comecon countries in the 1970s. “In addition to political means (the regular government-to-government work of embassies, the radio broadcasts, and the propaganda),” future US Ambassador to Poland Thomas W. Simons, Jr. wrote, “the West now has in place a variety of economic ties,” in Eastern Europe, starting with PL-480 grain sales after 1956 and shifting overt time to “credits, trade, scientific and technological cooperation, and some joint ventures.” This state of affairs was mutually beneficial, bestowing “tremendous political advantages” for both sides of the Iron Curtain:

It has ‘depoliticized’ the competition for influence, making that competition more correct and less tense, though not less real. The Soviets could tell themselves that they were merely doing their fraternal duty, building the infrastructure of the socialist community; dominion was the last thing they had in mind. The West could tell itself it was only doing business, disposing of surpluses, letting its businesses make profits; rollback or liberation was the last thing it had in mind. Each side, of course, remembered its own ‘last things’ and hoped that the other side would forget theirs. It was a convenient fiction, and it was especially useful for the East Europeans

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<sup>160</sup> 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.

themselves because, in pursuit of their national interests, it broadened their margin for maneuver in relations with both East and West.

With the advent of the Helsinki Final Accords and its human rights protections, “the East Europeans found that it provided a wonderful cover for a whole range of new bilateral dealings with Western countries.” Helsinki “repoliticized” East-West relations by adding human rights and stressing bilateral interaction and exchange, while, with the worldwide economic downturn, each side no longer had access to the “large economic resources available for competition, certainly not on the scale of the 1960s and early 1970s.” This also repoliticized the competition, “this time by subtraction of the resources needed to give it an economic form.” The economic downturn rekindled the long-simmering unrest in Poland and simultaneously constrained the ability of the Warsaw and the West to stimulate the Polish economy as 1977 approached.<sup>161</sup>

### **The new year of Charter 77**

On January 1, 1977, “Charter 77” sent shockwaves around the world when it kicked off the new year with a 3,000 word petition protesting the Czechoslovak government’s oppressiveness, arbitrary detention, and restrictions on free speech. Charter 77 was the immediate target of harassment, as Czech authorities warned, “Those who lie on the rails of history must expect to get their legs cut off.”<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Thomas W. Simons, Jr., “Strategy and Tactics in U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Eastern Europe,” in Paul Marer and Włodzimierz Siwinski, *Creditworthiness and Reform in Poland*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pg. 307-308.

<sup>162</sup> As another example of the importance of culture in Eastern Europe and a forgotten piece of oddball history, the artists whose cause Charter 77 took up were a psychedelic rock band called “Plastic People of the Universe;” “Declaration of Charter 77,” *Making the History of 1989*, Item #628, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/628>; National Intelligence Estimate, “Soviet Strategic Objectives,” January 12, 1977, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 5-6; Vaughan, “Helsinki Final Act,” pg. 15-17; Adam Bromke, “Czechoslovakia 1968 – Poland 1978: A Dilemma for Moscow,” *International Journal* (Autumn

RFE wrote that Charter 77, KOR, and other Helsinki watchdog groups could “present an even greater challenge” than previous movements that had often been “individual cries in the wilderness of ideals such as freedom and justice.” The new groups benefited from the Helsinki Accords, which represented “a standard with which their countries’ humanitarian records can be judged.” According to an RFE background report, it was expected that at the Belgrade review conference in October 1977 the Western Europeans and Americans would cite any violations of the accords:

and the East European dissidents seem to be acting with this in mind. The dilemma for the East European governments is that they must keep Belgrade in mind as well...How should the authorities react to movements that strive for the full implementation of existing laws? If they try to break up the groups and imprison their members, the governments only underscore the dissidents’ accusations that rights are being violated. But if they opt for restraint, the protest wave could continue to roll on. The dissidents compound this dilemma by denying all political ambitions and concentrating solely on documenting alleged violations of human rights...coming from within the country, it also deprives the governments of the interference-in-domestic-affairs charge, the standard defense against criticism from abroad.<sup>163</sup>

The Charter 77 signatories were emboldened because they knew that a wider reprisal would be difficult in light of the very public Western reaction that would result. The looming Belgrade review conference would “encourage moderation.”<sup>164</sup> At the same time, Poland had its own problems to deal with. As an RFE background report noted, unlike in Czechoslovakia, “recent Polish dissent covers a wide range of the population.”<sup>165</sup>

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1978), pg. 22; Norman Friedman, *The Fifty-Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2007), pg. 412-13.

<sup>163</sup> RAD Background Report/22 (Eastern Europe), January 28, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research Vol. 2, No. 1,” pg. 4.

<sup>164</sup> Situation Report Czechoslovakia/1, January 12, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research Vol. 2, No. 1,” pg. 1-3.

<sup>165</sup> RAD Background Report/22 (Eastern Europe), January 28, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research Vol. 2, No. 1,” pg. 6.

On January 1, 1977, *The Economist* wrote that the Polish government would soon have to decide once again whether to cut the food subsidies “which are fed to Polish consumers like a diet of tranquillisers” but which consumed the state budget. The editorial foresaw a strengthened opposition in 1977 emboldened by modern communication technology, economic dependence on the West, and the government’s knowledge “that any deviation from its present relative self-restraint will be put under the spotlight at the conference which is due to start in Belgrade next summer.” The combination of the elements of a “genuine labour movement,” the intelligentsia, and “that reserve army of any Polish opposition, the Catholic church” were not likely to be bought off with concessions as had long been the custom under Gierek and Gomulka before him. In short, the Polish people were primed and ready to make their move.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> “With the consent of the governed; There is a chance that Mr Gierek's Poland might change the political map of Europe in 1977,” *The Economist*, January 1, 1977, pg. 9.

### Chapter Three: Carter's Human Rights Offensive

Throughout 1976, the spark and ferment of Helsinki had enflamed Eastern Europe as watch groups and human rights organizations constituted themselves in Warsaw, Prague, Moscow, and elsewhere. This rising tide of opposition posed a question for the incoming Carter Administration: having articulated a Polish/East European policy in theory during the general campaign, how (and to what degree) should it be applied in principle and practice? This was debated not just during the transition period but well into the first year in office.

Drawing upon rhetoric developed during the campaign and in the writings of Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's administration would pursue a two-track strategy toward Poland, based on Brzezinski's idea of "peaceful engagement," which he described as a "carefully calibrated policy of simultaneous competition and cooperation" with the USSR. Washington would cooperate with Moscow in détente initiatives like SALT, MBFR, and CSCE, as well as technology transfer and scientific, technological, and economic exchanges. Washington would also, however, support causes that were in alignment with American values, such as the aggressive promotion of human rights, and the citation of human rights abuses when they occurred. Brzezinski was especially keen to expand the operations of Radio Free Europe in order to encourage gradual political reform in Poland. Carter agreed and proposed an ambitious expansion program for the embattled radio agency.<sup>167</sup>

Thus, America would engage in what Carter saw as a friendly competition for hearts and minds worldwide. The provisions of the Helsinki Accords provided a useful guideline by which to "score" these efforts. Key to this policy would be supporting the Polish dissidents,

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<sup>167</sup> Brzezinski, "U.S. Policy Toward Poland," pg. 316.

who were the largest and most powerful such group in Eastern Europe. This would be achieved through public affirmations of support, RFE, and the maintenance of cultural contacts through the US Embassy in Warsaw. At the same time, the United States would pursue policies to stabilize the regime of moderate technocrat Edward Gierek, who was more lenient with the dissidents than Polish hardliners and Moscow advocated. This strategy became “self-limiting” as it strove to maintain a balance between stabilizing the regime and destabilizing it so much that a crackdown or Soviet interventions occurred.

Carter administration officials suggested various policies to maintain this balance, and Carter employed many of them during 1977 – sometimes simultaneously. At times, supporting the dissidents meant restraining criticism of Gierek, who, if in a more vulnerable position politically, was more likely to buckle to the demands of the hardliners. This led to the paradox that sometimes supporting the dissidents meant keeping quiet about their repression. This created great confusion as onlookers tried to make sense of the contradiction.

### **The human rights policy takes shape**

The government’s concern for human rights was institutionalized through congressionally mandated State Department reports on all countries receiving security assistance (this would be expanded to countries receiving economic aid in 1978).<sup>168</sup> Moreover, the State Department’s human rights bureau was headed by the tough civil rights worker Pat Derian. It, along with the US Helsinki Commission was a full-time monitor of human rights compliance abroad. As a sign of its stature, the Commission required a semi-

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<sup>168</sup> Korey, pg. 24-28, 33.

annual report from the President on Helsinki compliance, reported on implementation progress to Congress, and provided information to members of Congress as requested.<sup>169</sup>

According to human rights scholar William Korey, “Carter’s relationship with the Helsinki Commission was close and intimate” from the start. After the election, the “possibility of public confrontation” between the Helsinki Commission and the White House disappeared altogether. The Commission was determined to take a dynamic, active, aggressive role toward the enforcement of human rights compliance worldwide.<sup>170</sup>

The point of contact for the Commission was the State Department’s office of Regional Political-Military Affairs within the Bureau of European Affairs (EUR-RPM). EUR-RPM “would naturally resist any effort that would weaken, undermine or threaten NATO on policy issues.” It saw the relationship with Eastern Europe in security, rather than human rights terms. The relationship between the Commission and the State Department was “frosty and unproductive,” in the words of one Commission staffer who complained of “condescending, elitist attitudes” among EUR-RPM’s career officers. This office also differed in outlook from the State Department’s human rights bureau, and such divisions would muddy the waters even further when policy debates kicked into high gear.<sup>171</sup>

The American human rights policy dominated the late winter and early spring months of 1977. Jimmy Carter spoke to the need for human rights during his campaign for president. It was in his inaugural address on January 20, however, that he gave his strongest statement on human rights, boldly declaring:

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<sup>169</sup> William Korey, *The Promises We Keep: Human Rights, the Helsinki Process, and American Foreign Policy*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), pg. xxiv, 24, 37-38.

<sup>170</sup> William Korey, *The Promises We Keep: Human Rights, the Helsinki Process, and American Foreign Policy*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), pg. xxv, 22, 28-30.

<sup>171</sup> Korey, pg. 32.

We are a proudly idealistic nation. But let no one confuse our idealism with weakness. Because we are free, we can never be indifferent to the fate of freedom elsewhere. Our moral sense dictates a clear-cut preference for those societies which share with us an abiding respect for individual human rights. We do not seek to intimidate, but it is clear that a world which others can dominate with impunity would be inhospitable to decency and a threat to the well-being of all people.<sup>172</sup>

Poles also heard on their radios a second inaugural statement recorded for the United States Information Agency (which included Voice of America) in which Carter promised, “You can depend on the United States to remain steadfast in its commitment to human freedom and liberty.” The Polish government made the first move and announced on the day of the inauguration that it would take a “softer line” toward the opposition and resolve disputes with “political means” rather than the heavy-handed measures it had employed after June 1976.<sup>173</sup> An RFE situation report derisively referenced Poland’s “token gestures in the form of a few suspended sentences.” It asserted that in light of the harassment of KOR members in Poland (over 100 of whom had been tried and “beaten by interrogators” during the winter), any legitimate political solution would have to be “a matter of concessions, rather than repressions, but neither side seems ready to make such concessions just now.”<sup>174</sup> In fact, the Polish government appeared to be making a substantial concession; it signaled to the new American administration that it would seek to maintain a better human rights record than its neighbors.

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<sup>172</sup> Inaugural Address, January 20, 1977, [American Presidency Project](#).

<sup>173</sup> Flora Lewis, “Poland Softens Stand on Critics,” *New York Times*, Jan. 20, 1977; Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pg. 361; Daniel C. Thomas, “Human Rights in U.S. Foreign Policy,” in Sanjeev Khagram, James V. Riker, and Kathryn Sikkink, eds., *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms*, pg. 81.

<sup>174</sup> RAD Background Report/12 (Czechoslovakia), January 19, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research Vol. 1, No. 1,” pg. 8; Situation Report Poland/3, February 1, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research Vol. 2, No. 1,” pg. 5.

After his first press conference on January 21, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance remarked he was struck by the press's "degree of interest, even sharpness, on human-rights issues." Some Americans approved of Carter's stress on human rights because it was rooted in American ideals. Others liked its punitive quality. Liberals and conservatives and helped elect Carter, would now have certain expectations attached to the human rights policy. This would prove problematic for the Administration. "Human rights had become the central theme of our foreign policy in the minds of the press and public," Carter later wrote in his memoirs. "It seemed that a spark had been ignited, and I had no inclination to douse the growing flames."<sup>175</sup> America had not created the movements in Eastern Europe, but Carter was determined to support their aspirations.

In a letter sent to Brezhnev on January 26, Carter outlined his administration's outlook for US-Soviet relations, noting that while he hoped relations would improve, they would be conducted "on the basis of reciprocity, mutual respect and advantage." At the same time, Carter wrote, "we cannot be indifferent to the fate of freedom and individual human rights... a competition in ideals and ideas is inevitable between our societies."<sup>176</sup> James Reston of the *New York Times* cynically but wittily noted "this is almost a theological point with Carter. He can't stamp out sin in the world, but he keeps on praying." The letter to Brezhnev highlights Carter's belief that competition and cooperation could coexist

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<sup>175</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*, (New York, 1982), pg. 145; Joseph Kraft, "Crusader Carter and the Dissidents," *Washington Post*, January 30, 1977; David S. Foglesong, *The American Mission and the "Evil Empire,"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pg. 164.

<sup>176</sup> "President Carter's Letter to General Secretary Brezhnev," January 26, 1977, US-Soviet Relations Collection, [Cold War International History Project Digital Archive](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/digital-archive), <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/digital-archive>.

successfully. A degree of Wilsonian idealism after the amoral realpolitik of Kissinger seemed to Carter a welcome breath of fresh air.<sup>177</sup>

Just after the inauguration, Soviet physicist and dissident Andrei Sakharov wrote a letter to President Carter asking him to make the cause of dissidents known. The letter was received by the State Department on January 21, and on the joint recommendation of Vance and Brzezinski, Carter replied. He informed Sakharov of his “personal commitment to promote human rights” within the Soviet sphere. He declared human rights a central concern of his administration, and pledged to “use our good offices to seek the release of prisoners of conscience and...to shape a world responsive to human aspirations.”<sup>178</sup> This communication between the President of the United States and a dissident was unprecedented and signaled that very public attention would be paid to human rights activists.

The Carter Administration pursued a more multilateral foreign policy with Poland than that of Henry Kissinger. It was made pointedly clear to Moscow that it was no longer the diplomatic catch-all for Eastern Europe. Instead, gestures would be targeted directly at Warsaw and at Edward Gierek. Brzezinski, who had been critical of Lyndon Johnson’s “indifferent approach” to Dubcek’s Prague Spring in 1968, “thought it vital the Administration speak out” in support of KOR, Charter 77, and other dissidents. He felt that the military doctrine of “massive retaliation” foreclosed the opportunity of bogging down the Soviets in a limited war in Eastern Europe supported by “limited, yet effective foreign

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<sup>177</sup> James Reston, “The Sakharov Letter,” *New York Times*, February 20, 1977; Garthoff, pg. 630.

<sup>178</sup> “Andropov to the Central Committee; Correspondence between Andrei Sakharov and Jimmy Carter,” February 9, 1977, *The KGB File of Andrei Sakharov*, Joshua Rubenstein and Alexander Gribanov, eds, [http://www.yale.edu/annals/sakharov/documents\\_frames/Sakharov\\_122.htm](http://www.yale.edu/annals/sakharov/documents_frames/Sakharov_122.htm); Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pg 156; Robert Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider’s Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), pg. 90.

support.”<sup>179</sup> In his worldview, the US was had a role in Eastern Europe and should exert its interests. As a result of the human rights movements that had emerged in the wake of Helsinki, Brzezinski wrote for “perhaps the first time since World War II...the Soviet Union is on the defense internationally and domestically at the same time.”<sup>180</sup>

Brzezinski felt that “evolutionary change” was more likely to occur in Eastern Europe than in the Soviet Union, and he argued the United States should seek to reward “those nations that evolved toward a more liberal internal political system and to call attention to the human-rights abuses in the others.”<sup>181</sup> Since the campaign, Brzezinski had exerted a “particular and growing influence” on Carter’s perception of détente, according to Raymond Garthoff. Nevertheless, there were lively debates in the upper echelons of the administration and the “most prolonged and intense” concerned policy toward the Soviet Union. Brzezinski wanted to take off the kid gloves and confront the Soviets about their human rights violations in high-profile meetings, particularly at the Belgrade review conference of the Helsinki Accords. He wanted more competition and overt, even antagonistic measures based on his conception of “geopolitical struggle” between the US and the USSR Without a doubt Brzezinski’s Polish background made him more eager to provoke Moscow.<sup>182</sup> This was not made any easier by the fact that Brzezinski, according to a colleague at Columbia, “thinks faster than almost anybody: He is always impatient to get to the point.”<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Brzezinski, “U.S. Policy Toward Poland,” pg. 316-318.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Kennedy, pg. 42; Wozniuk, pg. 44.

<sup>183</sup> “Brzezinski, a Man with a Trigger-Quick Mind,” *Polish-American Journal*, Vol. 66, Issue 1 (January 1977), pg. 1.

The deeply religious Carter sought to introduce a moral character into his foreign policy and was a strong believer in the potential for rhetoric and ideas to influence international events. He did not see Brzezinski's formulation as inherently contradictory: he supported détente and he was determined to speak out in support of the oppressed in foreign lands (at least some – this would always be tempered by strategic circumstance in practice, as, for example, toward Iran). Carter thought criticism was an acceptable, even necessary, part of East-West dialogue.<sup>184</sup>

Vance agreed in principle with Carter and Brzezinski; he saw competition, cultural engagement, and human rights as valuable parts of American foreign policy, and he endorsed criticism of the Soviet Union and East European countries, as long as it was voiced carefully and sparingly. However, Vance much preferred to engage in “quiet diplomacy,” and would advise caution to Brzezinski's often hotheaded suggestions.<sup>185</sup> Vance hoped that behind-the-scenes diplomatic groundwork could regulate the competitive aspects of the US-Soviet relationship. Carter hoped to manage the delicate balancing act that would blend these two schools of thought into a coordinated foreign policy that would support American interests and ideals.<sup>186</sup>

On January 26, the same day Carter wrote to Brezhnev, the State Department publicly reprimanded the Czechoslovak government for its treatment of the Charter 77 signatories; this marked the first time the State Department had ever publicly criticized a government for failure to comply with the Helsinki Final Accords. It was a major symbolic and concrete step,

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<sup>184</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*, (New York, 1982).

<sup>185</sup> Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), pg. 46.

<sup>186</sup> Vance, pg. 26-28, 46, Brzezinski, pg. 146-150, Garthoff, pg. 623-631.

and sent a strong signal to the East European capitals. Already, the Carter administration was treating the Czech and Polish governments differently, with the latter's more lenient record sparing it a human rights spotlight.

The Soviet Union strongly denounced the administration's condemnation of Czechoslovakia and reply to Sakharov as needlessly provocative and dangerous. Brezhnev responded to Carter's letter brusquely, declaring his intention to not "allow interference in our internal affairs, whatever pseudo-humanitarian slogans are used to present it," and condemning Sakharov as a "renegade who has proclaimed himself an enemy of the Soviet state." Communist leaders became more and more convinced that the Carter Administration would be satisfied "only with a fundamental change in their system," which was in a certain long-term sense true. These leaders saw, instead of executive naiveté and indecision, "nefarious motives, especially on the part of Brzezinski."<sup>187</sup>

The reaction in Poland to the new Administration was more positive. According to RFE background reports, the confluence of the worker-intellectual-Church "streams of protest represents a coalition of dissenting interests not seen in Poland since 1956. Realizing this fact, Warsaw has reacted more flexibility than its neighbors to the new wave of popular discontent."<sup>188</sup> For instance, Cardinal Wyszynski had lamented in January "it is painful when workers must struggle for their rights from a workers' state." Soon after, seven of the still-jailed June 1976 workers were released from prison.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pg. 155-156; Garthoff, pg. 633-634.

<sup>188</sup> RAD Background Report/22 (Eastern Europe), January 28, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in "Radio Free Europe Research Vol. 2, No. 1," pg. 6.

<sup>189</sup> RAD Background Report/22 (Eastern Europe), January 28, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in "Radio Free Europe Research Vol. 2, No. 1," pg. 9; Situation Report Poland/4, February 4, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in "Radio Free Europe Research Vol. 2, No. 1," pg. 4.

Under the pressure of protests in the cities and the countryside, Gierek decided to seek reconciliation and suggested on January 25 that clemency for the remaining jailed workers and activists might be possible.<sup>190</sup> Radio Free Europe background reports explained the triple threat had “pushed the Warsaw leadership into a corner from which it cannot easily escape. There will probably have to be an intense struggle between the two sides or a loss of face by one of them before this hurdle can be passed.” Warsaw’s reluctance to confront the dissidents was a function of the regime’s shakier political position in contrast to states like Czechoslovakia and East Germany. “Reluctance represents a prudent approach,” an RFE report noted, as an attack on any one segment of the opposition would likely cause a reaction by all three, and by 1977 “the web of dissident connections in Poland [was] too strong for Warsaw to sweep it easily away.” Gierek’s range of policy options was “strongly limited.” RFE situation reports also detailed the Eastern European governments difficulty in coordinating their responses to dissent, despite the fact that the protests could “prove extremely embarrassing to the conference at Belgrade.”<sup>191</sup> The Carter Administration was not averse, asserts scholar David Forsythe, to: “publicly embarrassing Communist countries in the Helsinki Follow-up Conferences and in other international meetings.” Mindful of this, Belgrade became an ever-present reminder to East European regimes that their conduct would not go unnoticed – and in a very public way.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Situation Report Poland/4, February 4, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research Vol. 2, No. 1,” pg. 4.

<sup>191</sup> RAD Background Report/45 (Poland), February 28, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research Vol. 2, No. 1,” pg. 16; RAD Background Report/22 (Eastern Europe), January 28, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research Vol. 2, No. 1,” pg. 10-12.

<sup>192</sup> David Forsythe, “Human Rights in U.S. Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 105, No. 3 (Autumn, 1990), pg. 446.

Vaughan has argued “Carter’s early emphasis on human rights provided Edward Gierek with a vested interest in distancing the Polish leadership from the heavy-handed tactics” of the Honecker’s East Germany and Husak’s Czechoslovakia, which toed the harsher line the Soviet high command endorsed. The Polish leadership kept its leniency low-profile in order to avoid Soviet demands that it, too, employ harsher methods. Some Polish Communists agreed with Soviet policy, while others had a “sneaking agreement with the critics” on the need for a more open society. Given these divisions, Gierek tried to respond “his own way.” The *New York Times* noted that many in the US foreign policy community agreed with the Poland-watcher who said, “This is a surprising country. Anything can happen. You can never be sure with Poles.”<sup>193</sup>

The new administration’s human rights policy received a mixed reception elsewhere in the world; authoritarian leaders in Latin America chafed at the new restrictions on foreign aid. Among the allies, the French and German governments were especially unsettled by the American gestures, although the Canadians and British were generally more supportive. According to Warren Zimmerman, the head political officer at the Paris Embassy 1977-80, the French feared that a human rights approach would destabilize important places such as Iran, and “saw it as a kind of a childish approach to the adult game of diplomacy which had to do with things like the balance of power and realpolitik and Machiavelli and God save us not Thomas Jefferson and people, fuzzy thinkers like that.” But unlike the Soviets, or to a degree, the West Germans, “the French did not actively try to undermine the initiatives that

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<sup>193</sup> Patrick Vaughan, “Beyond Benign Neglect,” *The Polish Review* (Vol. 64, No. 1, 1999), pg. 8; “..And the East Finds Helsinki Uncomfortable,” *New York Times*, Jan. 23, 1977; RAD Background Report/71 (Czechoslovakia), March 31, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research Vol. 2, No. 1,” pg. 4; Situation Report Poland/11, April 29, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research, 2:2, March-April 1977,” pg. 20.

the Carter administration was taking,” Zimmerman recalled, although he added, “They groused a lot; they complained a lot.”<sup>194</sup>

Having called for engagement with Poland through a multi-faceted policy in the presidential campaign and made some dramatic early statements, Carter was now faced with the implementation of such a program. Carter did not regard his human rights offensive which challenged “their internal political regime as inconsistent with détente.” But he was in a collision course with the Kremlin. The Soviet leadership had determined by late 1976 that “it must make a concerted effort to sever the growing ties” between Western governments and the increasingly vocal dissidents. Carter’s policy was to strengthen these ties. The Carter administration did not want to topple or to provoke a Soviet intervention, but it did want to encourage the political opposition in Poland. It hoped to strike a delicate and perilous balance.<sup>195</sup>

### **The price of doing business with America**

On February 1, Carter met with Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador to the United States, for the first time and informed him that although he would not interfere with the internal affairs of the Soviet Union, he “would expect all existing agreements to be carried out, including those relating to human rights.” By signing the Helsinki Accords, the Soviet Union had “placed the subject of human rights firmly on the agenda of legitimate discussions between our two nations.” This thinking was reflected in Presidential Review

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<sup>194</sup> Interview with Warren Zimmerman, *Frontline Diplomacy*; “Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting, Monday January 31, 1977,” January 31, 1977, Juanita Kreps Papers, Box 23, Notes of the Cabinet Secretary 1977-78 Folder, 2 of 2, Duke University Archives; Raymond D. Gastil, *Freedom in the World: Political Rights and Civil Liberties, 1978*, (New York: Freedom House, 1978), pg. 64-65; Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pg. 361.

<sup>195</sup> Garthoff, pg. 628-629.

Memorandum (PRM) 9, “a broad review of US policy concerning key European issues” that Carter requested in early February. A particular area of interest was Eastern Europe, which PRM-9 was expected to examine in terms of its:

political, economic and social stability. The status and outlook in each country for relative internal liberalization and external independence should be examined. In particular, there should be a discussion of how the US should approach the area and the countries involved; whether and how we should differentiate among the countries in trading or political relations... This review should include an examination of the role of RFE/RL.

PRM-9 also called for examination of CSCE, particularly its prospects “for increasing East-West contacts and effecting changes in the human rights area.” PRM-9 was expected to calibrate American policy so that it would best maintain stability as well as liberalization across Eastern Europe. Bilateral ties would be strengthened and expanded where possible, and Poland was considered a primary target of opportunity. Jack Seymour, the State Department’s Polish desk officer from 1977-1979, described how the Carter administration “differentiated” between the East European countries. Differentiation, Seymour explained, involved “fine tuning our relations” with each Eastern European country according to three criteria: how pluralistic and open the country was politically and socially, how respectful it was toward democracy, diversity, and human rights as outlined in the Helsinki Accords, and how much independence it was willing to show with regard to not only the Soviet Union but the Warsaw Pact. The United States would work to expand the exchange of ideas through Radio Free Europe and cultural contacts alongside the bilateral agreements, which were largely economic. This would be the price of doing business with America.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Gates, pg. 89; Presidential Review Memorandum, “Comprehensive Review of European Issues,” PRM/NSC-9, February 1, 1977, pg. 1-3; Interview with Jack Seymour, *Frontline Diplomacy*; “The Month in Review,” *Current History*, Vol. 72, No. 426 (April 1977), pg. 190.

Poland was a ripe target. A CIA memorandum issued by the Office of Regional and Political Analysis in February underscored instability within Poland and the region, noting that “resistance to ‘domination’...is as much alive as ever. Such feelings have contributed deep emotion to international economic issues...they are at the bottom of the USSR’s continuing worries in Eastern Europe.” The Poles in particular exhibited anti-Communist nationalism and “anti-Soviet ethnocentrism.” Moreover, “a cultural heritage whose bias drives the East European countries toward the West still thwarts Moscow’s desire for a buffer of loyal and stable states on its western flank.” Eastern Europe remained one of the key sources of tension between Washington and Moscow. In Poland in particular, KOR’s expansion of the strikers’ cause “into a human rights issue in Helsinki terms” created an opportunity for the United States to use cultural contacts and expanding commercial ties to put muscle into the human rights campaign abroad. The CIA memo noted:

[The] allure of the West is as strong as ever in Eastern Europe. The Iron Curtain metaphor has lost much of its meaning, not only because Moscow under Brezhnev has not attempted to impose a Soviet-style internal order on these countries but because of the requirements of modern technology that have pushed Eastern Europe toward the West. The ideology that is implicit in Western popular culture is ultimately subversive of Leninist precepts and, more to the point, of a political order that puts its emphasis on unquestioning discipline and obedience.<sup>197</sup>

In other words, a policy of cultural exposure and engagement could degrade the Communist edifice in Poland much more effectively than bombs and missiles – and, in theory, without the attendant risk of open war. Orthodox Communism, “never very strong

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<sup>197</sup> Intelligence Memorandum (RP 77-10020), “World Trends and Developments,” February 1977, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 10-23; House Committee on International Relations, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *The Belgrade Followup Meeting to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: A Report and Appraisal*, Report, May 17, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., pg. 5.

below a committed intellectual elite, has lost much of its vigor even for that group.”<sup>198</sup> By the late 1970s, control was exerted less by brute force than by economic incentives. While “the mailed fist was by and large the answer to the question of who was in charge and by what right,” during the 1940’s and 1950’s, the Intelligence Memorandum noted, Poland’s leaders had in the 1970’s “become economic determinists: keep people well fed and well clothed, and they will not make trouble. Political hegemony will follow in due course.” Gierek and his allies were moderate technocrats; Poland had achieved remarkable growth early in the decade, but as this growth became difficult to sustain the moderates had faced a stark problem. Unfulfilled promises “are a prescription for trouble” for the Polish leaders, as they had found out in June 1976 when workers had expressed their displeasure over a “highhanded” increase in prices “in the only way they knew how: by riot and sabotage.” Ominously, the CIA report noted that Poland’s economic prospects were “more of the same in 1977.”<sup>199</sup>

Would Poland’s political situation also be the same? Gierek’s primary goal during 1977 was to “keep the lid on” the dissidents.<sup>200</sup> Washington was pushing Gierek toward moderation, and Poland wanted to improve its relations with the United States. While Warsaw sought specific objectives such as most favored nation trading status, the Carter administration sought cultural exchanges and leniency toward Polish dissidents. It also expanded the role of Radio Free Europe.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Intelligence Memorandum (RP 77-10020), “World Trends and Developments,” February 1977, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 23.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, pg. 25.

<sup>201</sup> Intelligence Memorandum (RP 77-10020), “World Trends and Developments,” February 1977, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 28.

RFE created a problem for Communist governments in that it not only “produced publicity in the West” but also beamed it back into Eastern Europe, in the words of Raymond Garthoff.<sup>202</sup> This “problem” was even more pronounced under the Carter Administration, which had signaled during the Presidential campaign that it would support RFE and allow it to operate with more latitude than the State Department and White House had previously permitted. Brzezinski was an especially forceful believer in RFE. Increasingly, soft measures such as international broadcasting and cultural exchange would be used with an eye toward affecting the political climate in Poland.<sup>203</sup>

It was becoming apparent to a startled Soviet Union that human rights were going to be less a subtext to foreign policy than an ideological standard to be wielded by what they saw as a dangerous White House. In a press conference on February 8, Carter himself from his predecessor, who had felt:

that if you mentioned human rights or...invite Mr. Solzhenitsyn to the White House that you might endanger the progress of the SALT talks. I don't feel that way. I think it ought to be clear, and I have made clear directly in communication to Mr. Brezhnev and in my meeting with Ambassador Dobrynin that I was reserving the right to speak out strong and forcefully whenever human rights are threatened--not every instance, but when I think it is advisable. This is not intended as a public relations attack...and I would hope that [Communist] leaders could recognize the American people's deep concern about human rights.<sup>204</sup>

Criticism of the Communist bloc's human rights record was not a contradiction of Carter's view of détente. In fact, US relations with communist countries could reflect civility and evenhandedness as did the Carter administration's dealings with Gierek in 1977. In his

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<sup>202</sup> Garthoff, pg. 629.

<sup>203</sup> Szulc, pg. 186; Patrick Vaughan, “Beyond Benign Neglect,” *The Polish Review* (Vol. 64, No. 1, 1999), pg. 8; Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pg. 362-363.

<sup>204</sup> “The President's News Conference,” February 8, 1977, [American Presidency Project](#).

congratulatory message, Gierek had wished the new president “success in your endeavors” and expressed his hope for a continuation of the US-Polish “political contacts” and cooperation in “the fields of economy, science, technology and culture.” Gierek believed “substantial possibilities exist in this respect,” and that “friendly Polish-American cooperation constitutes a valuable contribution to the cause of strengthening peace.” In response, Carter extended to the Polish leader his assurance “that the United States will continue in its commitment to world peace and the strengthening of international cooperation. I want to strengthen the ties of friendship between the people of your country and ours.”<sup>205</sup>

The omens were not propitious. In early February, Soviet security forces broke down the doors of Alexander Ginzburg and the leaders of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group and hauled them off to jail.<sup>206</sup> This sent a clear message to the security organs of the Warsaw Pact nations. In Poland, the Catholic Church anxiously awaited a comparable wave of repression. Interested in maintaining its stature and expanding its influence in Polish society, the Church found itself in the paradoxical position of pushing for political concessions alongside the workers and KOR while also seeking “to avoid giving the impression that it is a political force agitating against the government.” According to an RFE background report, the Church considered itself a “loyal opposition,” loyal not to the Communist government but “to what it sees as the interests of the Polish nation as a whole. The Polish Church sees itself as the protector of the country’s national interests, the defender of the faith and the

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<sup>205</sup> Cable, Cyrus Vance to Warsaw Embassy, “2/9/77, “CO 126, 1/20/77-2/28/78,” folder, Box CO-49, WHCF-Subject File, Jimmy Carter Library; Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), pg. 20

<sup>206</sup> Vaughan, “Helsinki Final Act,” pg. 17.

nation.” The Church supported many of the state’s policies, for example its claims to German territories, but “when the boundaries of strategic necessity are overstepped, or Warsaw seems, for example, to come too close to Soviet ideology or practices, the agreement between Church and state ends.”<sup>207</sup>

As the most conservative of the three streams of protest in Poland, the Church formed a baseline for consensus. Polish clergy had issued the first serious criticism of the government’s reaction to the June riots a full two months before KOR organized in September. As RFE explained, the Church “created an environment in which the KOR – in spite of official harassment – could act and indeed, in the heroic sense of the word, flourish.”

<sup>208</sup> The Polish government was wary of upsetting the Church, as it knew that many measures the clergy opposed would be even more unpalatable to intellectual and worker activists. Because of this, political amnesty, relaxed censorship, and other civil rights became easier to attain, which allowed the intellectuals to push the boundaries of state patience on other fronts. KOR needed the Church’s support, but the Church worked to keep its distance in order to avoid giving the impression of active engagement in political activity. Legitimate differences of opinion existed between the left-wing, Marxist intellectuals and the conservative Catholic clergymen. Nevertheless, the Polish opposition was slowly fusing into a coalition in defense of the workers.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> RAD Background Report/45 (Poland), February 28, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research Vol. 2, No. 1,” pg. 12-13; “News Highlights,” *Polish American Journal*, Vol. 66, Issue 2 (February 1977).

<sup>208</sup> Situation Report Poland/25, October 13, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research,” pg. 8-9.

<sup>209</sup> RAD Background Report/45 (Poland), February 28, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research Vol. 2, No. 1,” pg. 17-19; Memo, Situation Room to Zbigniew Brzezinski, February 16, 1977, NLC-1-1-1-10-7, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library.

### **The implications of permanent “revolution”**

Having endured the Carter administration’s criticism for nearly three months, the Soviets hit back hard, warning that continued interference in its domestic affairs would endanger détente. In mid-spring, the CIA clandestinely obtained from a source in the Hungarian leadership a description of the Soviet high command which painted the picture, “of a grim, remarkably insecure, almost paranoid Soviet party leadership, worried to death about what it perceives as a genuine threat or challenge to its power – from the US human rights campaign, and incredible as it may seem, believing that the US stand on human rights is a deliberate strategy designed to overthrow the Soviet regime.” Gromyko, in his memoirs, placed specific agency on Carter’s personal role “as Washington engaged more and more actively in ideological subversion against the USSR.”<sup>210</sup>

Coordination of US diplomatic action was improving as the State Department and the US Helsinki Commission drew into a closer working relationship. Chairman Dante Fascell and Secretary Vance enjoyed a close relationship, and Patt Derian, head of the State Department human rights bureau, was elevated to Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights.<sup>211</sup> Many career foreign service officers remained uncomfortable with public criticism of their host countries’ human rights records. Like Vance, they preferred traditional, low-key diplomacy, which they felt provided the best atmosphere for human rights to flourish – and made their daily lives considerably less tense. In contrast, the Helsinki Commission thought that shining “a giant spotlight upon rights violations [was] the only way to make progress.” This tension relaxed somewhat after Vance placed Deputy Secretary of State Warren

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<sup>210</sup> Gates, pg. 90-91.

<sup>211</sup> Korey, pg. 37-38.

Christopher, a close friend, colleague, and second ranking member of the State Department, in charge of the department's committee overseeing human rights.<sup>212</sup>

As one of Christopher's first acts, he, along with the Director-designate of the USIA and the Chairman of the Board for International Broadcasting (BIB), endorsed an interagency report (of the State and Defense Departments, the Joint Chiefs, OMB, USIA, and BIB) calling for an expansion of RFE/RL and VOA transmitters to reinforce "the importance with which we view the Helsinki commitment to the freer flow of information and ideas." Such a program would bolster human rights and access to information.<sup>213</sup>

Despite the interagency tension on human rights, one tenet all sides agreed upon was that the precise mixture of criticism to dialogue would depend upon international conditions. In an early March weekly report to the President, Brzezinski ranked Soviet actions since January under three criteria: "benign" (SALT, CTB, Indian Ocean, chemical warfare, radiological warfare, nuclear proliferation), "neutral" (Middle East, arms transfer, MBFR), and "malignant" (neutron bomb, human rights, CSCE, South Africa, Horn). That Brzezinski used oncological terms was not likely an accident. In particular, Brzezinski noted human rights were "suppressed" by the Communists, particularly the Soviets, who had enjoyed "some success in toning down US criticism abroad." The report called the Soviets "uncooperative and destructionist" regarding CSCE and the upcoming Belgrade review conference. According to Brzezinski's memoir, he intended to suggest that the USSR "was prepared to be cooperative in those functional areas likely to cement a parity relationship with the United States," while remaining uncooperative on ideological and political areas. "In

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<sup>212</sup> Korey, pg. 38-41.

<sup>213</sup> Memo, Warren Christopher to Jimmy Carter, February 18, 1977, DDRS.

effect, the Soviet Union is seeking, and apparently has had some success in obtaining, a selective détente,” Brzezinski concluded. In response, he called for not only cooperation on the “benign” topics but active initiatives to increase the costs of a continued “malignant” stance by the Soviets.<sup>214</sup> One such initiative was a renewal of the covert operations that Carter himself had campaigned against.

At Brzezinski’s urging, Carter had approved several proposals for “covert propaganda actions inside the USSR” within the first months of his Administration, and Brzezinski had designs for the same in Poland. Robert Gates, then a CIA analyst, recalls in his memoirs how “bureaucratic inertia” and resistance within the CIA sidelined these proposals in the moribund Soviet/Eastern Europe (SE) division of the CIA’s Directorate of Operations (DO), which oversaw the CIA’s clandestine activities. In 1977, the SE division’s focus on covert activity “had declined from low to nearly nonexistent.” Even though Brzezinski’s covert proposals focused on relatively uncontroversial measures such as supporting and distributing banned academic journals and works, these were still beyond the pale to those in the State Department and the CIA who did not want to destabilize the region. There was, however, a precedent for such activity stretching back as far as 1956, when Radio Free Europe staffers including Brzezinski’s friend, professor Adam Bromke, had operated the Polish Overseas Project delivering messages to Poland via balloon and through widespread mailing projects. Bromke and Brzezinski had even contributed until 1969 to one journal which “enjoyed tacit access to Poland” in exchange for not pushing political boundaries too far. As well, the CIA had long operated what the *New York Times* called a “communications empire,” ranging

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<sup>214</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pg. 188.

“from Radio Free Europe to a third-string guy in Quito who could get something in the local paper.” Despite Brzezinski’s urgings, however, the proposals were tabled.<sup>215</sup>

Attention turned to international broadcasting and the potential impact of Radio Free Europe. The US Embassy in Warsaw cabled Vance on March 7, noting that a prominent Polish editor had told an embassy officer that he and many other Poles “welcomed the Western attention to human rights issues in Eastern Europe. He specifically cited the President’s letter to Andrei Sakharov. The secret, he continued, was to know where to draw the line in such commentary before arousing defensive mechanisms which shatter any hope of liberalization.” This was indeed the crux of the human rights policy, and the point around which all arguments centered. The editor cited Western media as the “chief avenue of communication between the dissidents and the regime,” but warned that Western journalists overwhelmingly reported on human rights abuses while the “more important unrest” of the average Polish citizen was still economic and largely “unconnected to the human-rights issue.” Western media and broadcasting were the “only hope,” the editor claimed, for these economic concerns “to penetrate the top leadership of the party and government.” He in essence called for a policy which encapsulated all of the elements Carter had outlined in PRM-9. The cable asserted “that an official so high in the Polish media establishment would look approvingly on human-rights criticism by the West reflects a pervasive sentiment among educated Poles, favoring some measure of democratization of Polish society.”<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Gates, pg. 90-91; Letter, Adam Bromke to Zbigniew Brzezinski, 4/5/77, “CO 126 1/20/77 - 2/28/78” folder, Box CO-49, WHCF-Subject File, Jimmy Carter Library; “Worldwide Propaganda Network Built by the C.I.A.,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1977.

<sup>216</sup> Cable, Warsaw Embassy to Cyrus Vance, March 7, 1977, DDRS.

While Washington debated its stance toward Eastern Europe, leaders of East Europe met to coordinate their response to Charter 77, KOR, and the other human rights groups on March 2 and 3 in Sofia. The Czech, Bulgarians, and Hungarians were in favor of adopting the firm Soviet policy toward the dissidents and Eurocommunists, while the Poles, perhaps mindful of their own troubles and seeking support for Gierek's moderate approach, "advised caution" in dealing too harshly with the opposition. In the end, it was decided "not to publicly attack" the disaffected groups, but to allow the national parties to privately contain their "excesses." For a time, Gierek would have breathing room.<sup>217</sup>

Soon after the Sofia meeting, the Polish party daily *Trybuna Ludu* ran a series on Western anti-Communist plots against Poland throughout the Cold War. Focusing on the present day, the lead article asserted that "all anti-Communist émigré centers have been regenerated, and petty groups of opponents of socialism within the socialist countries are being called to life." These groups were in league with the forces of capitalism and the foreign press, especially "foreign radio stations, papers, and propagandas centers" which churned out "lies and distortions against Poland."<sup>218</sup> Echoing the severe anxiety of Sofia, *Trybuna Ludu* implied that the United States' human rights policy and support of Radio Free Europe and Voice of America had no other purpose other than to seek the total dismemberment of the Warsaw Pact.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> RAD Background Report/85 (World Communist Movement), April 26, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in "Radio Free Europe Research Vol. 2, No. 1," pg. 3.

<sup>218</sup> Situation Report Poland/8, March 16, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in "Radio Free Europe Research, 2:2, March-April 1977," pg. 6.

<sup>219</sup> Situation Report Poland/9, March 23, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in "Radio Free Europe Research, 2:2, March-April 1977," pg. 2.

Communist attacks on the US radio services, which TASS lambasted as “one of the most powerful mouthpieces of American imperialism,” intensified under Carter. While Moscow seethed over RFE broadcasts, Foggy Bottom feared the radios were threatening détente. There was constant concern at the NSC and BIB about “soft State positions” on the radios and human rights, especially as planning for the Belgrade review conference picked up. As Jack Seymour, the State Department’s Polish desk officer in 1977, explained, the State Department Human Rights Bureau, Policy Planning Staff, and the European Bureau “all wanted to make Helsinki work for us, but there were sometimes tensions over the tactics,” within the State Department and when dealing with other departments and agencies.<sup>220</sup>

In a March 17 speech to the United Nations, Carter defended his administration’s stand, arguing, “no member of the United Nations can claim that mistreatment of its citizens is solely its own business. Equally, no member can avoid its responsibilities to review and to speak when torture or unwarranted deprivation occurs in any part of the world.”<sup>221</sup> Carter firmly placed the question of human rights advocacy in the context of the Helsinki Accords; this elevated it to internationally mandated duty. These questions were not academic, as the Administration well knew. Prominent Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky publicly stated “Western pressure is the only possible way of saving the movement and having real

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<sup>220</sup> Intelligence Memorandum (RP 77-10060), “Dissident Activity in East Europe: An Overview,” April 1, 1977, NLC-56-1-1-1-7, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Interview with Jack Seymour, Frontline Diplomacy; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, February 23, 1977, DDRS; Memo, Paul Henze to Jessica Tuchman, February 23, 1977, DDRS; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, February 25, 1977, DDRS; Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, April 4, 1977, DDRS.

<sup>221</sup> “United Nations – Address Before the General Assembly,” March 17, 1977, American Presidency Project; Elizabeth Drew, “Reporter at Large: Human Rights,” *The New Yorker*, July 18, 1977, pg. 41.

détente.”<sup>222</sup> A few days later, he was arrested after visiting the apartment of a US embassy officer.<sup>223</sup>

By March 18, Carter administration officials were meeting with prominent Poles such as the Deputy Chairman of the Polish Economic Planning Commission to discuss possible bilateral measures and East-West trade issues. Such contact would lay the groundwork for any new bilateral agreements between the US and Polish governments.

The Carter Administration had to walk a fine line between encouraging liberalization and better relations with the West and endangering the opposition by giving hard-liners in Moscow an excuse to clamp down. The Polish opposition could not exist without the leniency of Gierek and the moderates. Therefore, Washington understood that it was important policy that Gierek remain in a position of strength. He had to resist the entreaties of the hardliners, but he still had to fear the effects of hurting relations with the United States. The Carter administration hoped that in Poland democratic tendencies could gain strength, and it hoped that “soft power” such as broadcasting and cultural exchanges would be effective here without being too provocative. Accordingly, Brzezinski hoped to remove Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty from the “excessive political control” of the State Department, which had often censored scripts by the harder-edged and largely émigré RFE staff.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Robert Sharlet, “Dissent and Repression in the Soviet Union,” *Current History*, Vol. 73, No. 430 (October 1977), pg. 117; David Shipler, “Soviet Links Dissidents to C.I.A.; Arrests Expected,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1977, pg. 3.

<sup>223</sup> John Harrod, cited elsewhere in this chapter, lived in the same building at the time; Interview with John P. Harrod, [Frontline Diplomacy](#).

<sup>224</sup> Szulc, pg. 8.

Brzezinski told the *Economist* in March "it would certainly be within the rules of peaceful coexistence, as the Soviet leaders have defined it," if the West were to give "some realistic encouragement of pluralism via nationalism and separatism" in the Soviet bloc. The USSR had interfered periodically in US internal affairs, as well as in the Caribbean and Latin America. At the same time, the Soviet Union paid lip service to the autonomy and sovereignty of the East European states, couching even its bloody interventions in the mandates of the Warsaw Pact treaty. Brzezinski, for his part, was more than happy to test their commitment to these principles, and he saw RFE as the perfect medium for this message.<sup>225</sup>

### **Their “tuba”: the expansion of Radio Free Europe**

On March 22, President Carter issued a report to Congress requesting funding for eleven 250-KW transmitters to bolster the nine already in operation for RFE/RL, effectively doubling the operations of RFE/RL. “International broadcasting is a key element of United States foreign policy...Our most crucial audiences for international broadcasting are in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe,” the report explained. RFE/RL was a “vital part of the lives” of the Polish people. Although these upgrades would almost double the transmitting capacity of RFE/RL, the report, which was available to the public, noted that at least sixteen more RFE/RL transmitters would be needed to “assure a satisfactory probability of reception” and an “ability to penetrate jamming” in the future. This was based on a study which predicted that total US transmitting capacity in Europe would drop by 60% in 1977 alone, well “below the minimum level required for effective broadcasting into Eastern

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<sup>225</sup> Editorial, “101 problems for Mr Brezhnev,” *The Economist*, March 19, 1977, pg. 62.

Europe and the USSR, even if all the governments in the target area were to cease jamming.”<sup>226</sup>

The Carter Administration therefore called for upgrades at RFE/RL’s German, Spanish, and Portuguese installations, as well as for twelve new VOA transmitters for Africa and Asia.<sup>227</sup> The construction of these, the report estimated, would take from three to five years and cost \$45 million. According to Radio Free Europe, the report confirmed that “the president is not only determined to continue the operations of these radio stations, but also to increase them.”<sup>228</sup> This investment in the radio services represented a long-term commitment to dissident movements, which were dependent upon Western radio for news and information. Even though a fiscal conservative, Carter argued against cost-saving measures such as the consolidation of programming to save costs, warning the “political disadvantages of such measures far outweigh the budgetary savings or technical efficiencies.” Worse, he wrote, such measures could contribute to a “weakening” in American commitment to the provisions of the Helsinki Accords.<sup>229</sup>

*Trybuna Ludu*, Poland’s party daily, called the report “astonishing” and contrary to the spirit of improving relations, calling RFE and RL “subversive, cold-war institutions”

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<sup>226</sup> Memo, Peter Tarnoff to Zbigniew Brzezinski, August 6, 1977, DDRS.

<sup>227</sup> Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, July 29, 1977, Brzezinski Materials, Box 9, Folder: 2-12/77, Jimmy Carter Library; Memo, Paul Henze to William Hyland, July 29, 1977, Brzezinski Materials, Box 9, Folder: 2-12/77, Jimmy Carter Library; BIB Annual Report 1977, cited in Gene Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty: An Insider’s Memoir of Radio Liberty*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pg. 171; “United States International Broadcasting Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report,” March 22, 1977, American Presidency Project; Message, Jimmy Carter to Congress, March 22, 1977, International Organizations Box IT-2, Folder: IT 11, 1/20/77-1/20/81, Jimmy Carter Library.

<sup>228</sup> Radio Free Europe’s budget at that time was \$53.3 million, VOA’s budget \$69.4 million; David Binder, “Carter Requests Funds for Big Increase in Broadcasts,” *New York Times*, March 23, 1977, pg. 6; Situation Report Poland/10, March 23, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research, 2:2, March-April 1977,” pg. 10.

<sup>229</sup> Report, President Carter to Congress, “Report on International Broadcasting,” March 22, 1978, in BIB Annual Report 1978, pg. 40.

which incited the “anti-Polish” human rights movement which was in “blind servility to foreign anti-communist centers.”<sup>230</sup> Carter defended his request. These funds, he argued were *not* aimed at increasing propaganda against the East.<sup>231</sup>

RFE had a powerful ally in Brzezinski. In 1975, he had argued that “for less than 15 cents per head per year [RFE/RL] have become the most significant US levers for freer communications – and thus for social change – in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.”<sup>232</sup> After his time in the White House, Brzezinski wrote, “While the Radio should not be used to foment insurrections in the East, it should, in my judgment, serve as an instrument for the deliberate encouragement of political change.”<sup>233</sup> He was a major driving force behind the expansion proposal.<sup>234</sup>

The radio services were essential for an effective cultural or human rights offensive. Spinning them off into independent agencies, as some had suggested, would remove a vital source of governmental leverage on Communist nations, and particularly Poland. The most important spotlight on Poland was Radio Free Europe. Carter’s choice of a new head for the head of the board overseeing RFE<sup>235</sup> would set the tone for the Administration’s relationship with RFE/RL, a critical conduit of information for the Polish people (RFE’s largest audience in Eastern Europe). By 1977, the radio services operated under an overlapping set of authorities, and some felt that reform was needed to eliminate confusion. Early in its

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<sup>230</sup> Memo, Situation Room to Zbigniew Brzezinski, March 28, 1977, NLC-1-1-3-66-4, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; “Carter Picks Gronouski to Head Radios Aimed at the Soviet Bloc,” *New York Times*, March 27, 1977, pg. 10.

<sup>231</sup> “Carter Explains Radio Funds,” *New York Times*, March 30, 1977, pg. 6.

<sup>232</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, “The Deceptive Structure of Peace,” *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 14 (Spring 1974), pg. 42.

<sup>233</sup> Gates, pg. 95.

<sup>234</sup> Patrick Vaughan, “Beyond Benign Neglect,” *The Polish Review* (Vol. 64, No. 1, 1999), pg. 8.

<sup>235</sup> The Board for International Broadcasting.

existence, Radio Free Europe had operated under the discreet auspices of the CIA, which provided generous funding while maintaining a *laissez-faire* attitude toward programming. Following the revelation of the CIA ties in 1973, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty were combined and placed under the authority and oversight of the Board for International Broadcasting (BIB), whose members were appointed by the President and approved by Congress. However, while the BIB held budgetary authority over the two radio agencies, the RFE/RL corporate board retained authority over broadcast policy. At the same time, the State Department and the White House intervened from time to time to encourage or discourage specific commentary, creating a patchwork of competing interests.<sup>236</sup>

Since the mid-1970s, some in Congress had felt that the radio services needed further reforming, and pushed for VOA and USIA (US Information Agency) to be merged within the State Department's cultural unit. RFE/RL would remain under the independent BIB. Others sought to make both VOA and RFE/RL private and independent, serving a role closer to that of the BBC. The radio service and its supporters worried – how would the changing winds of legislation affect RFE? What support could they expect from the White House? How much latitude would they have with regard to broadcasts?<sup>237</sup>

Paul Henze, a close confederate of Brzezinski and NSC staff member for intelligence coordination and international broadcasting, described the search for a new BIB Chair in a February 17 memo to Brzezinski. While MIT professor Bill Griffith, a longtime friend of Brzezinski and RFE policy director until 1959 (where Paul Henze had been his policy staff

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<sup>236</sup> Puddington, pg. 261.

<sup>237</sup> Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, March 24, 1977, DDRS; Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pg. 361-362.

deputy) was Brzezinski's choice,<sup>238</sup> Henze noted "a broad degree of consensus" for John Gronouski, who had been Ambassador to Poland under Lyndon Johnson and was supported by the RFE/RL staff. Henze saw Gronouski as a better fit for the job than current Chairman David Abshire, who had "been a very activist, interventionist Board Chairman [and]...made it much more of a job than it needs to be." Henze, who had been a CIA station chief, advised a *laissez-faire* attitude toward the RFE/RL staff, giving latitude toward the programming staff versus the executive leadership.<sup>239</sup> Henze believed, like Brzezinski, that the national minorities within the USSR and Eastern Europe would contribute to its undoing, and that the radios could encourage this progress. These feelings were also shared by Griffith, who, Henze wrote to Brzezinski, "is eager to serve on the BIB; suggest you discuss this with him."<sup>240</sup>

However, the Administration was in favor of the reform and consolidation of USIA and the State Department's CU Bureau for the opposite reason of many reform proponents: to make their work more efficient, to attract qualified staff, to and further raise their profile. The Carter administration thought reform should increase the agencies' effectiveness, not make them more independent. The Carter Administration would seek the same ends for RFE, albeit without reorganization.

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<sup>238</sup> Puddington, pg. 105.

<sup>239</sup> Many of Henze's memos have been declassified and are available in the Carter Library and in the Declassified Documents Reference System. While these memos and evening reports are very helpful at indicating the types of policy discussions going on within the NSC, the conversation is decidedly one-sided, as Brzezinski's responses are noticeably absent; Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, February 17, 1977, DDRS.

<sup>240</sup> Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, February 23, 1977, DDRS; Memo, Paul Henze to Jessica Tuchman, February 23, 1977, DDRS; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, February 25, 1977, DDRS.

RFE was a powerful force. One Polish official noted that because of American radio, “The danger of each hostile action can no longer be measured by the force and extent of the local group which starts that particular move. It must be multiplied by the power of the facilities for ideological subversion available abroad.”<sup>241</sup> Transcripts of all Radio Free Europe broadcasts were made available to the top Polish Communist Party officials, according to research conducted by political scientist Jane Leftwich Curry. They used positive portrayals in RFE reports against their rivals in internal debates, a back-handed admission of the radio station’s power. When RFE predicted governmental action, the government would frequently delay such moves purely to reduce RFE’s credibility. The Polish government, well aware that KOR and the Church passed material to RFE in order to transmit messages to their supporters, called Radio Free Europe their “tuba.”<sup>242</sup> John Richardson, Jr., the Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs from 1969-1977, described Radio Free Europe Research’s operations in Munich as “widely regarded at the time as by far the best thing of its kind in the world - better than anything CIA had in terms of understanding the political dynamics at the moment going on in these countries.”<sup>243</sup>

To make matters worse for Gierek’s government, Polish listenership during the Carter Administration reached all-time highs, according to Arch Puddington.<sup>244</sup> Poland’s proportion of RFE listeners had routinely been higher than in Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria.

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<sup>241</sup> Puddington, pg. 203.

<sup>242</sup> Jane Leftwich Curry, “Radio Free Europe in the Eyes of the Polish Communist Elite,” in A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta, *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011), pg. 154, 158-160, 166.

<sup>243</sup> Interview with John Richardson, Jr., [Frontline Diplomacy](#).

<sup>244</sup> Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), pg. 253.

Research conducted by the Center for Public Opinion Research in Warsaw (OBOP), which was attached to Polish state radio, indicated that by 1977, 25% of the Polish public admitted listening to RFE.<sup>245</sup> RFE's Department of East European Audience and Opinion Research (EEAOR) had 49% of Poles admitting to having listened to RFE during 1977, with 21% listening to VOA and 23% listening to the BBC.<sup>246</sup> EEAOR data showed that between 1974/75 and 1980, RFE jumped from 66% to 90% as a reliable source for domestic events. In the same time period, Polish radio fell from 13% to 0%, while VOA increased from 6% to 17%, and BBC from 8% to 50%. This means that at minimum, RFE was considered to be five times more reliable than state radio when reporting on Polish domestic affairs. Data on reliability on external events is available only in 1974/75, when RFE rated 57%, compared to 12% for Polish Radio, 7% for VOA, and 15% for the BBC. Again, RFE was considered roughly five times more reliable than state radio. OBOP data collected in 1978 showed 78% of the public considered that all or most information reported by RFE was true, and EEAOR data from the same period indicated 74% believed RFE a reliable source.<sup>247</sup>

The Polish bureau was exceptionally important within RFE, commensurate with Poland's geopolitical importance. RFE had been the first to break the news of the 1970 Polish uprising on the Baltic, an event which held great importance to dissidents.<sup>248</sup> While

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<sup>245</sup> The actual figure may have been even higher: only 18% of those polled openly admitted to listening to RFE. Another 7% admitted to listening to RFE after being specifically asked; Lechoslaw Gawlikowski, "The Audience to Western Broadcasts to Poland During the Cold War," in A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta, *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011), pg. 127.

<sup>246</sup> Gawlikowski, pg. 129.

<sup>247</sup> Gawlikowski, pg. 137-139; Report, "The Impact in Other Countries of RFE's Coverage of Czechoslovak Dissent," February 1977, Radio Free Europe, Audience and Public Opinion Research Department, pg. 9.

<sup>248</sup> The 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary ceremonies of the 1970 uprising were the famous 1980 Gdansk demonstrations that led to the creation of Solidarity; BIB, Annual Report 1979, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1979), pg. 6.

Moscow had stopped jamming the VOA, the BBC, and other foreign radios after September 1973, it maintained interference of RFE/RL signals until 1989.<sup>249</sup>

Still, despite the Communists' assertion that they confronted a monolithic Western broadcasting cabal, the truth was less impressive. Rivalry and squabbling between the RFE/RL Board and the BIB was intense. Henze met with Leonard Marks, USIA director and former president of RFE/RL fundraising, on March 14 to discuss reports that outgoing BIB chairman Abshire was lobbying Congress to remove the BIB from White House control<sup>250</sup> and to install Griffith's rival Frank Stanton as BIB chief. According to a State Department official, "All the fuss has been about alleged White House [read Brzezinski] plans to appoint him [Griffith] Chairman." Henze called this "a classic case of someone in the bureaucracy...scheming to prevent the Administration from making the selections it wants for appointive positions and lobbying with Congress to frustrate the freedom of choice of the White House." The intense drama surrounding this appointment reflected a serious disagreement: Griffith and Gronouski supported the Carter Administration's desire to expand the radio services while Stanton, the former president of CBS, wanted to reduce investment in international broadcasting and possibly even privatize the radios.<sup>251</sup> Stanton not only enjoyed wide support in Congress – he was Vance's preferred candidate.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> After Solidarity organized in Poland in August 1980, the USSR resumed jamming of all radio broadcasts; BIB Annual Report 1977, cited in Gene Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty: An Insider's Memoir of Radio Liberty*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pg. 173.

<sup>250</sup> Although technically an independent Congressional agency, the White House nominated the BIB's members.

<sup>251</sup> Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 4, 1977, DDRS; Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 4, 1977, DDRS; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 6, 1977, DDRS.

<sup>252</sup> Vance and Stanton had known each other for years as members of the boards of the Rockefeller Foundation and Pan-American World Airlines, and through the Council on Foreign Relations. Stanton was also a board member of Public Agenda, a nonprofit Vance had established in 1975; Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, March 14, 1977, DDRS.

In a memo to the President on March 18, Brzezinski outlined the potentially negative effects of Stanton's appointment and two amendments which would "make US information programs harder for the government to manage and less amenable to White House influence."<sup>253</sup> This was not merely a turf war. As Paul Henze noted in a memo to Brzezinski: "If we accept the idea that information programs are part of our national security effort, just as our military and intelligence programs are, there is a good case for your asserting yourself a bit in this field and not leaving it only to State, which always tends to give it short shrift."<sup>254</sup> Former USIA director Leonard Marks, as well as the current director John Reinhardt and RFE/RL board chairman John Hayes were strongly opposed to the amendments. Henze advised a concerted White House effort against the amendments, writing that, "Neither of these amendments is in the interest of the Administration... If we don't act to fend these off, the whole radio broadcasting field could be badly screwed up by them."<sup>255</sup>

Carter in March nominated Gronouski to head the BIB, putting to rest the speculation over who would be chosen. Griffith had been his first choice, but he was passed over when it was clear he would face significant political opposition in Congress. The choice of Gronouski mollified the Polish-American community, which was upset over not having more Poles in government, but it was a blow to Brzezinski, who had long collaborated with

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<sup>253</sup>The McGovern-Pell amendment would abolish the RFE/RL board, while the Percy amendment advised the absorption of USIA into the State Department and spinning off VOA as an independent agency in an arrangement somewhat like that of the BBC; Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, March 18, 1977, National Security Affairs Subject File, Box 9, Board for International Broadcasting Folder, Jimmy Carter Library; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 4, 1977, DDRS; Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 4, 1977, DDRS; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 6, 1977, DDRS.

<sup>254</sup> Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, March 24, 1977, DDRS; Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pg. 361-362.

<sup>255</sup> Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 4, 1977, DDRS; Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 4, 1977, DDRS; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 6, 1977, DDRS.

Griffith and shared many of his views. As early as 1966, Brzezinski and Griffith had written in an internal evaluation of Radio Liberty broadcasts, “Your [RL’s] job is not looking out for their [the Soviet listeners] interests; it is to promote US interest and it is in the US interest to weaken the Soviet regime.”<sup>256</sup>

Brzezinski accepted the inevitable and met with Gronouski on March 30. In his talking points for the meeting, Henze had noted, “RFE/RL will continue to be important as instruments for carrying out the President’s policies on human rights and free flow of information.” As well, the memo clearly stated “the BIB should not become an extra layer of management,” and that along with the transmitter expansion program proposed by the White House “the next major task is to take steps to modernize the radios” through upgrades such as new studio equipment, and an effort to “rejuvenate their staffs” through appointing “younger people...with a good understanding of politics and how to manage people. Appointing retired [foreign service officers]...and USIA people to management jobs is not a good idea. Younger people should be sought from the academic world and from among journalists.” Brzezinski saw the BIB as RFE’s liaison with Congress – it should assist RFE/RL but remain hands-off on programming and policy matters.<sup>257</sup>

While the expansion project would take some time to implement, the management of RFE felt that it was entering “a period of relative stability” under Carter Administration, which hoped to expand its budget and loosen the reins on its writing staff. RFE would remain

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<sup>256</sup>Griffith was made an official senior adviser to Brzezinski in 1979, where he would be known by some as Brzezinski’s “idea man;” “Radio Board Choice Stirs Controversy,” *New York Times*, March 12, 1977, pg. 6; “Carter Picks Gronouski to Head Radios Aimed at the Soviet Bloc,” *New York Times*, March 27, 1977, pg. 10; “News Highlights,” *Polish American Journal*, Vol. 66, Issue 5 (May 1977); Puddington, pg. 97, 105, 116.; Gene Sosin, “Sparks of Liberty: An Insider’s Memoir of Radio Liberty,” (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pg. 115-116.

<sup>257</sup> Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, March 29, 1977, DDRS.

a source of pressure on the regime in Warsaw. But Gierek faced other challenges. In late March, he declared at a Central Committee plenum that “class enemies, both at home and abroad, should be combated with all available means and unmasked before society.” Gierek’s harsher language was indicative of the growing influence of hardliners in the Polish government.<sup>258</sup>

### **The Soviet empire strikes back**

Soviet anger over the Carter administration’s human rights policy peaked during Vance’s visit to Moscow from March 28-30. Almost immediately upon his arrival, Vance was startled by Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev’s “diatribe in which he catalogued alleged human rights abuses in the United States.” Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko made sure to grimly remark at a press conference that American human rights policies “poison the international atmosphere” and threatened US-Soviet relations.<sup>259</sup> Vance gave a speech soon after the meeting indicating that the Administration was considering pursuing human rights “less stridently.” He hinted that issues concerning Warsaw Pact countries would be pursued through private diplomatic channels when this approach seemed “more promising.” While the human rights offensive had some success in deterring harsher measures against the dissidents, its tone, at least as the Soviets claimed, was having effects on the health of détente. The dissidents could be supported in less blatant ways. Vance’s subtler, reasoned approach was gaining currency in Washington.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Situation Report Poland/10, March 23, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research, 2:2, March-April 1977,” pg. 12.

<sup>259</sup> William Hyland, *Mortal Rivals: Superpower Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, (New York: Random House, 1987), pg. 215.

<sup>260</sup> Vance, pg. 46, 53-55; Andrei Gromyko, *Only for Peace: Selected Speeches and Writings*, (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979), pg. 213, 241; Vaughan, “Helsinki Final Act,” pg. 17.

The situation in Poland, a CIA Intelligence Memorandum concluded in early April, is “by far the most volatile in Eastern Europe. A major blow-up could come at any time.” Despite steps taken by the regime to quell discontent, the popular mood is “tense and sullen...dissatisfaction is rooted in economic problems that the regime cannot solve nor significantly ameliorate any time soon.” In light of this, Gierek sought to continue his program of treating the intellectuals and KOR “with kid gloves,” foregoing most arrests and harassment and releasing workers and promising amnesty for those remaining in custody. Gierek was trying to avoid doing anything that would give KOR a new lease on life after the last June rioter was freed. It was Gierek’s hope to minimize the influence and volume of KOR and the dissident movement by taking small liberalizing measures and avoiding brutal repression. For the time being at least, the Politburo indicated its support for this moderate course, but there were elements within Poland quietly but persistently advocating for a harsher response.<sup>261</sup>

The CIA memo noted the Soviets had very limited options with Poland. Due to their own economic situation and the fear of throwing good money after bad, the Soviets were loath to send more aid to Warsaw. They also wanted to avoid advocating a draconian crackdown. To date, the Soviet leadership had been willing to support Gierek’s moderate approach both to the dissidents and to Poland’s economic troubles. However, if the political situation continued to deteriorate, the CIA anticipated “Gierek will be in deep trouble with Moscow.” It was not clear how long Gierek would be able to hold his position. Having dealt harshly with their own dissidents, the Soviets had a strong case for asking Eastern Europe to

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<sup>261</sup> Intelligence Memorandum (RP 77-10060), “Dissident Activity in East Europe: An Overview,” April 1, 1977, NLC-56-1-1-1-7, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library.

do the same. The Soviets had done exactly that at the Sofia summit. The CIA predicted if the economic morass continued the Soviets would push Gierek to adopt a more orthodox economic policy. The Polish leader, however, hoped to quickly return to the massive technology imports that had characterized the early boom of his tenure (ideally, fueled by cheap Western credit). Moscow had “never been comfortable with Poland’s crazy quilt of socialism and private enterprise,” and saw the economic crisis as a prime opportunity to reform it.<sup>262</sup>

Nevertheless, in the short-term, Gierek and his colleagues “will probably muddle through,” the CIA concluded, unless the party leader made a major tactical mistake. If the Soviets forced Warsaw to take a tougher stance on the dissidents, “the odds of serious trouble in Poland” would “go up appreciably.” The US would be an important factor in this – if détente broke down and the US pushed Moscow too hard on human rights, a major crackdown or intervention could result. At the same time, the CIA admitted the dissidents might be positively encouraged by the efforts of the US championing their cause abroad. The situation was combustible.<sup>263</sup>

*The Economist* reported that dissidents across East Europe and the Soviet Union expected “an all-out attack against the remnants of the dissident movement,” though their fears may be exaggerated. “What worries the Soviet leaders is that dissent had become contagious;” such anxiety tacitly confirmed the early successes of the movement. The article cited Poland as the only instance where the movement had “managed to reach beyond a

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<sup>262</sup> Intelligence Memorandum (RP 77-10060), “Dissident Activity in East Europe: An Overview,” April 1, 1977, NLC-56-1-1-1-7, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library.

<sup>263</sup> Intelligence Memorandum (RP 77-10060), “Dissident Activity in East Europe: An Overview,” April 1, 1977, NLC-56-1-1-1-7, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, April 4, 1977, DDRS.

limited circle of intellectuals,” and asserted that the success of the Polish dissidents since June 1976 had surpassed that of the entire Soviet bloc in the previous ten years. The Church in Poland had become “almost a parallel power in the country” to the government, an unthinkable circumstance in East Germany or Bulgaria. The article quoted KOR’s Jacek Kuron, who explained past attempts to divide the Polish opposition, stating, “Freedom was the business of intellectuals and bread the business of the workers... When the workers grasp that bread and freedom are part of the same struggle, the rulers are thrown on the defensive.”<sup>264</sup> Into April, the CIA still felt that the potential for serious trouble remained great in Poland, a country with a “deep strain of anti-Russian nationalism and a recent history of worker unrest and street violence... [and] a new surge of political activism” among the intelligentsia and the Church.<sup>265</sup> While the agency saw no evidence in Poland of an imminent threat to the “security of the regime” it acknowledged that Soviet internal analysis of the situation was believed to be much more “alarmist” than the United States.<sup>266</sup>

Meanwhile, Edward Gierek signaled a shift in his government’s attitude toward the opposition in a speech to the Polish Central Committee plenum on April 14, where he charged that critics of the state would be “unmasked and will be opposed by all necessary means.” In a follow-up speech on April 25, Gierek referred to the “increased activity of the forces hostile to Poland and socialism.” RFE noted official policy toward KOR “seems to have reached a new stage in recent weeks.” After much delay, and with little maneuvering room, Gierek was forced to respond to his critics at home and to the east. Jacek Kuron and

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<sup>264</sup> “Poland’s dissidents; Pioneering?,” *The Economist*, April 16, 1977, pg. 57.

<sup>265</sup> CIA Report, “Moscow and the EuroCommunists: Where Next?” (RP 77-10078), April 1977, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 5.

<sup>266</sup> CIA Report, “Moscow and the EuroCommunists: Where Next?” (RP 77-10078), April 1977, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 6.

Jan Lipski, two of the founders of KOR, were informed by Polish authorities that they were “suspected of maintaining illegal contacts with foreign organizations said to damage Poland’s political interests,” specifically Radio Free Europe and the Paris-based émigré publication *Kultura*. If convicted, they faced from six months to five years. Police searched their apartments and detained other dissidents. The increasingly militant mood in the East European parties and in the Soviet Union was edging the Polish government ever closer toward a dramatic confrontation with KOR, the Church, and the worker activists.<sup>267</sup>

As it happened, Polish policy was also being decided in Washington on April 14; the Policy Review Committee chaired by Cyrus Vance met to discuss PRM-9’s study of US-European relations. As Brzezinski wrote in his memoir, PRM-9 outlined four basic approaches to relations with Eastern Europe: favor those nations more independent from Moscow; favor those that were more liberal internally; expand ties with the entire region; or limit ties with the entire region. Brzezinski recalled no support for the last option but vigorous debate at the meeting over whether to support some countries more than others. Brzezinski strongly argued for the first two options, which he argued would support “polycentrism” in Eastern Europe, while some in the State Department favored expanding trade in the region without any preferences for certain countries. After a lengthy debate, Vance concluded by noting a general consensus on a fusion of the first two options and called for follow-up studies on strategy for the individual countries.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Situation Report Poland/11, April 29, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research, 2:3, March-April 1977,” pg. 1-2; Wozniuk, pg. 65.

<sup>268</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pg. 297.

The administration increasingly leaned toward differentiation, or dealing with each country on its own merits.<sup>269</sup> This was already in effect in many ways, for instance, as when the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia had been directly targeted for criticism while Poland escaped the spotlight in light of Gierek's offer of clemency to some dissidents.

Even with the recent arrests, the Polish government was still more lenient than its peers. This posed a dilemma: was this state of affairs a result of Polish civil society, which should therefore be supported by the American government? Was it a direct result of American policy? Or was it a result of the lessened tensions under *détente*? The Carter administration could not be sure, but it did know that it had to tread carefully in Poland. Tensions were high there: even though the human rights offensive had been temporarily curbed, the dissidents were at a rolling boil, and moderate leaders were feeling the squeeze from the hardliners. Cardinal Wyszyński warned the Polish government on April 25 that "Polish workers are ready to carry out a Marxist-style revolution" against their own government. Wyszyński urged the clergy support the workers' struggle.<sup>270</sup>

The most effective way that the U.S. government could buttress the dissident movement in Poland remained Radio Free Europe. The importance of RFE to the Carter Administration is vividly illustrated by an incident that transpired at the G-7 economic summit on May 7. West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt told Brzezinski that he was tired of Radio Free Europe, "a cold war relic...operating on German soil, that its presence was contrary to *détente*, and that he would like to get it out of Germany." West Germany had, through the quiet diplomacy of *ostpolitik*, improved relations with East Germany and Poland

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<sup>269</sup> Hedrick Smith, "U.S. Policy on Soviet: A Two-Edged Attitude," *New York Times*, Jan. 29, 1977.

<sup>270</sup> "Wyszyński Speaks Out," *Polish American Journal*, Vol. 66, Issue 7 (July 1977).

in a “quiet, unpublicized way,” and Schmidt did not want to jeopardize these gains by rashly angering the Soviets.<sup>271</sup>

Brzezinski shot back hotly that Radio Free Europe “was an important element of the overall US policy toward the East, including our interest in the security of Germany, and that such matters could not be declared unilaterally or outside the larger security context.”

Brzezinski gave a firm, reasoned defense of the radio service, recalling later to Vaughan: “I told him to just bear in mind that Radio Free Europe’s presence in Munich is an integral part of the American military presence in Germany – and it’s directly related to our sense of security in Europe. And you can’t separate the two.” Brzezinski told Puddington that Schmidt “dropped the issue there and then, and there is no evidence that Schmidt pressed the issue again during his term as chancellor.” RFE was an unquestionable, iron-clad priority for the Carter administration. As Vaughan writes, “Brzezinski insisted that keeping pressure on the Eastern European regimes would provide breathing room for the burgeoning opposition movements in the region. This was especially true as Soviet bloc regimes sought to burnish their image before the follow up conference to the Helsinki process was set to begin at Belgrade.”<sup>272</sup>

RFE was not only facing criticism from Schmidt but also from Moscow and even Congress. Henze noted on a May 17 memo to Brzezinski, “Moscow is continuing its attacks against RFE and RL, claiming that US government should not be financing such

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<sup>271</sup> Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), pg. 47-50; “A cool Atlantic between Schmidt and Carter,” *The Economist*, April 9, 1977, pg. 37; “Carter, meet Schmidt,” *The Economist*, April 30, 1977, pg. 11.

<sup>272</sup> Carter, *White House Diary*, pg. 49-50; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pg. 293; Puddington, pg. 185-186; Vaughan, “Helsinki Final Act,” pg. 19-20.

irresponsible and uncontrollable organizations.”<sup>273</sup> Gronouski, already acting as de facto BIB Chairman, and Senator Hubert Humphrey were working to “fend off” the radio amendments still being considered. It helped that Soviet attacks on Gronouski and Griffith mirrored those in Congress and the American press. Henze felt that the State Department wanted to keep the radios “as bland as possible” and was in general “a worry-wart” due to its “natural conservative inclinations.” That evening, Henze wrote in his evening report to Brzezinski that the Warsaw and Bucharest embassies “have come in with complaints about RFE’s handling of dissidents and human rights - they feel it is being overdone. I don’t think this really adds up to a major problem, or a major transgression on the part of RFE, but will stay abreast of BIB/State dialogue on it.” Due to successful lobbying by Administration allies in Congress, the Congressional threat to RFE/RL and the BIB was effectively ended by the end of May.<sup>274</sup>

The question of how to deal with the impasse in Poland would be taken up in the next major watershed in Eastern Europe policy, PRM-28, issued on May 20, 1977. Eighty-five pages long, PRM-28 called for a review of US policy with respect to human rights.<sup>275</sup> Acknowledging the “limits of our power” to effect change, the memo called for American policy to orient itself toward evolutionary action rather than revolutionary action in order to support “growth in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe of democratic forces” which could

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<sup>273</sup> Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 10, 1977, DDRS; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 16, 1977, DDRS; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 17, 1977, DDRS.

<sup>274</sup> Henze reported in memos to Brzezinski that he was tracking Congressional development of the radio amendments closely; Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, April 4, 1977, DDRS; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, April 12, 1977, DDRS; Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, April 12, 1977, DDRS; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, April 25, 1977, DDRS; Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, April 26, 1977, DDRS; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, April 27, 1977, DDRS; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, April 28, 1977, DDRS.

<sup>275</sup> Presidential Review Memorandum, “Comprehensive Review of European Issues,” PRM/NSC-28, May 20, 1977, pg. 1-3.

in time lead to the development of “more open societies.”<sup>276</sup> Policy toward Eastern Europe was to be “firm and consistent but non-polemical.” A clear commitment to human rights would be “directed to the people of these countries as well as their governments.” Despite concerns that aggressive human rights rhetoric might harden the Soviet position, the memo felt the “Soviet Union will continue to pursue its perceived interests” in arms control, trade, scientific and cultural exchanges, and other areas of our bilateral relations “regardless of our advocacy of human rights.” The USSR needed MBFR, SALT, “technological transfer agreements” and “commercial credit arrangements” too badly to jeopardize on the basis of US human rights advocacy.<sup>277</sup>

PRM-28 addressed the role of RFE in Polish relations as well. RFE, USIA, and the cultural and educational programs of by the State Department were integral parts of the human rights offensive. These would complement and support the policy by increasing “international awareness of the effort.” RFE had specifically played a “key role in the rising awareness that has accompanied the burgeoning human rights movement,” especially in Poland. Activists in Poland and elsewhere “frequently cite RFE/RL’s extensive coverage of events suppressed by their own media as a vital source of information.” With the proposed expansion program for the radios in place, jamming would become less effective and larger audiences would be within reach, acting as a force multiplier and increasing the effectiveness of American public diplomacy.<sup>278</sup>

In order to achieve these goals, the memo advised, public statements “can be quite useful in promoting our human rights goals...while official rhetoric is an extremely

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid, pg. 7.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid, pg. 7-19.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid, pg. 58-62.

important weapon, it must be used with skill and discrimination, if it is to retain its potency.”<sup>279</sup> Differentiation was endorsed as the organizing principle of Polish policy. In addition, symbolic acts would in some circumstances be “even more effective than public statements and may not present the same risks. They can be particularly useful in encouraging countries with good human rights records. Invitations to state visits, Presidential letters, goodwill missions, special visitor programs and the like are highly valued abroad. By directing them more so than in the past to countries with good or improving human rights records, we will send a very effective signal.” This was consistent of the Carter Administration’s attention to sometimes subtle “soft power” levers as useful foreign policy tools. As will be seen, these appealed to Edward Gierek, who craved these symbolic visits in order to bolster his position. Another option available was to reduce economic and military assistance. It was a more serious measure which was not recommended “until the less drastic options have been tried and found wanting.” Still, cuts in aid would demonstrate “tangibly that it can be costly to violate human rights and valuable to respect them.”<sup>280</sup>

PRM-28’s recommendations for US-Polish policy would be taken seriously. American economic aid alone was so vital to Poland’s economic and political health that it would be particularly potent vehicle of Western pressure. Poland was the largest market in Eastern Europe – and did the most trade with the United States. This would make a draconian crackdown costly for Gierek. At the same time, the opportunity for symbolic visits by American officials and new economic agreements would draw Gierek toward liberalization while strengthening his position at home and with Moscow. Having shaken up East-West

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid, pg. 34.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid, pg. 35-37.

relations with the human rights offensive, the American diplomatic corps would work over the coming months to stabilize a moderate government in Poland in the hopes that domestic forces could achieve reform without crackdown or intervention.

James F. Brown, Director of Radio Free Europe, testified to the US Helsinki Commission that Poland's record on human rights was the second best in Eastern Europe behind Hungary. This was due "to a large extent because of the strength of society in Poland." Polish activists knew that they were "gaining publicity in the West." Their writings were even read at the Commission hearings, including a statement by no less than Adam Michnik, who reported that freedom of expression "is a fiction. Even at private gatherings it may lead to police intervention." The right of travel was routinely violated, letters were routinely opened and read, and access to information was restricted by the government. Still, it could have been much worse.<sup>281</sup>

On June 16, Hubert Humphrey led the final defeat of the radio amendments in the Senate 77-13. "This victory," Henze wrote, "will be an enormous morale boost for the radios and puts Gronouski in a very strong position as he takes over the chairmanship of BIB after confirmation, we expect, before end of month." The new chairman saw the chief problem at the radios "that they are on much too tight of a budgetary leash."<sup>282</sup>

The determined and optimistic Gronouski hoped to get an additional \$10 million increase in funding from Congress the following year, and according to Paul Henze, "believes, with proper Congressional preparation, that he can get it." Gronouski's position

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<sup>281</sup> House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *Implementation of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: Findings and Recommendations Two Years After Helsinki*, Report, September 23, 1977, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., pg. 36-41.

<sup>282</sup> Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, June 17, 1977, NLC-27-5-12-52-7, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Fitzhugh Green, *American Propaganda Abroad*, (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1988), pg. 44.

was boosted by the release of RFE Audience Research Studies which indicated that 97% of listeners felt that the broadcasts were good or excellent, and that 94% felt the newscasts were superior to that of the local stations. Gronouski concluded that with regard to programming, “the danger of RFE being too conservative is greater than the danger of appearing too progressive.”<sup>283</sup>

Carter had won a significant victory with regard to Radio Free Europe. By not only securing a significant expansion of RFE’s transmitting power but warding off legislation that would curb or curtail the Executive Branch’s influence on the radios, Carter ensured that international broadcasting would remain a human rights tool and a potent means of influence in Poland. By securing the nomination of John Gronouski as BIB Chairman, Carter was able to relax some of the natural tensions that had exacerbated the tempers of RFE’s budget-starved staff. Although it is very difficult to place a fixed value on “soft power” sources such as RFE, the station was clearly a source of inspiration and aid to the Polish opposition. It is regularly cited in their writings.<sup>284</sup>

Carter’s human rights policy had never been “absolute.” It varied from country to country – human rights trimmed to circumstance. While human rights made the US relationship with the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and other Communist nations much more tense, Carter’s policy toward Poland was in many ways traditional diplomacy, and this

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<sup>283</sup> Memo, Europe to Zbigniew Brzezinski, July 18, 1977, NLC-10-4-1-12-2, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, July 20, 1977, NLC-10-4-2-1-3, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, October 13, 1977, DDRS.

<sup>284</sup> Adam Michnik, Maya Latynski, *Letters From Prison and Other Essays*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pg. 162; Adam Michnik, Irena Grudzinska-Gross, *Letters from Freedom: Post-Cold War Realities and Perspectives*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pg. 65; Adam Michnik, David Ost, *The Church and the Left*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pg. 109; Anthony T. Salvia, “Poland’s Walesa Addresses RFE/RL Fund Conference,” *Shortwaves*, Nov. 1989, pg. 1, cited in Michael Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997); Puddington, pg. 268.

would prove especially true as 1977 progressed. Bureaucratic infighting and indecision, fueled by Carter's tendency to allow lengthy debate among his advisers, had created some confusion as to the level of support the dissidents could expect, but the Carter Administration was much more supportive of the strikers and dissidents than had been the Ford administration. The Soviet Union and its allies saw a subversive, dangerous campaign being assembled against their entire political system. The new Administration's emphasis on human rights and "soft power" through expanding RFE/RL, VOA, and the cultural exchanges was seen as dangerous and provocative. Through a policy of differentiation, Washington criticized hardline governments like Czechoslovakia while withholding criticism of Gierek. Stabilizing the Polish leader's regime through economic aid while at the same time maintaining steady pressure on it through the human rights initiative was seen as the most effective way to support the dissident movement without sparking a revolution or a Soviet intervention. This finely calibrated policy would constitute one of the Carter Administration's greatest unsung achievements.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Clair Apodaca, *Understanding U.S. Human Rights Policy*, (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2006), pg. 56.

#### **Chapter Four: The Economics of “Peaceful Competition”**

The Carter Administration’s policy toward Poland in early 1977 was dominated by the “human rights offensive.” The Soviet Union was offended by what it saw as Washington’s intrusion in domestic affairs, and it exerted pressure on Poland to clamp down on its critics. By the middle of the year the Carter Administration had moderated its public statements and shifted toward the quiet diplomacy championed by Cyrus Vance. From the first days of the administration, Zbigniew Brzezinski also sought an expansion of covert action in Eastern Europe and an expansion of Radio Free Europe. This program to double RFE operations was successfully pushed through Congress during the summer and constituted a major achievement for Carter. During the remainder of 1977, American diplomats and policymakers focused on cultural exchanges and economic carrots and sticks to stabilize the Gierek regime and encourage it to maintain its moderate stance toward the dissidents.

Human rights and RFE were still a part of the equation, but nuts and bolts diplomacy took precedence over dropping high-profile bombshells. Exchange programs became more and more evident. Economic negotiations became increasingly common as the year progressed, especially in the fall and early winter leading up to Carter’s trip to Warsaw in December.

Public diplomacy of all stripes held an important place in US-Polish relations. Historian Nicholas Cull, Carter has traced Carter’s “particular interest” in international exchanges. Yale Richmond, Deputy Assistant Director of the State Department's exchange

programs from 1971-1980 (and called “Mr. Everything on exchanges” by fellow Foreign Service Officer John Harrod), later recalled of the cultural exchanges:

The biggest effect was in places like Poland and Hungary. Soviets had difficulty getting out to visit the United States or Western Europe, but it was very easy for a Soviet scholar or scientist to go to Warsaw or Budapest... So, all of the exchanges we had with Poland and Hungary and later with Romania and Bulgaria had a ripple effect in the Soviet Union. Soviets could then go to Poland and Hungary and find out what people in their field were doing in the West. Poland has traditionally been Russia's window on the West. That was true in the czarist era and it was true under the Communists also.<sup>286</sup>

The exchanges performed two important functions: they acted as a transmission point for ideas and concepts and they reinforced détente and bilateral ties. The US Embassy in Warsaw managed a wide array of cultural exchanges, including speakers, musical groups, and Fulbright scholars who exposed Poles to American culture, ideals, and history. As the State Department reported in PRM-28, exposing leaders and professionals to the Western way of life had “human rights consequences.” The overwhelming impression of most visitors was “that the American people do care about human rights and that the United States does seek to protect and fosters them.” American professors delivering seminars in law abroad might “address human rights concerns.” This would be more effective, PRM-28 had suggested, if it is made clear “that while we do not link human rights to other issues, progress on that front will at least be conducive of progress on other fronts... while we deny a linkage, the Soviets have it within their power to create one.”<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> “U.S. Information Agency: An Overview,” U.S. Information Agency, October 1998, pg. 5, <http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/usia/usiahome/overview.pdf>; Interview with Yale Richmond, *Frontline Diplomacy*; Interview with John Harrod, *Frontline Diplomacy*.

<sup>287</sup> Poland was granted limited access to American waters for fishing purposes; Interview with Anna Romanski, *Frontline Diplomacy*; “USA & Poland in joint fish research,” *Polish American Journal*, Vol. 66, Issue 8 (August 1977); “News Highlights,” *Polish American Journal*, Vol. 66, Issue 9 (October 1977); Presidential

Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Arthur Hartman, testifying before the Helsinki Commission, cited Poland as an example of the success of the administration's human rights policy in affecting change in Eastern Europe. This was in part due to the buildup of "extensive relations" including: "exchanges of visits by the Presidents/First Secretary; active exchange programs in culture, education, science and technology; and a significant level of trade, which is still growing rapidly." Importantly, Gierek had mostly resisted the temptation to repress his people; police harassment and jailing of dissidents were relatively rare, and detainees were often released quickly. Gierek still hoped to temper political activism by continuing his policy of socialist "consultation" with the people. Hartman confirmed the Administration's ongoing desire "to be responsive to – and to encourage as responsibly as possible – the desires of Eastern European countries for greater autonomy, independence, and more normal relations with the rest of the world."<sup>288</sup>

Scientific, industrial, and commercial exchanges furthered cooperation in areas as varied as joint fishing and chemical engineering. April 1977 saw the establishment of the largest exchange to date, bringing together Lock Haven State College, Piper Aircraft, and Marie Curie Skłodowska University in a "profitable and promising cooperation" to allow Poland to build its first non-military aircraft for sale to Comecon countries. Such exchanges

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Review Memorandum, "Comprehensive Review of European Issues," PRM/NSC-28, May 20, 1977, pg. 62-64, 73-75.

<sup>288</sup> Gierek had visited the United States in October 1974; Piotr Stefan Wandycz, *The United States and Poland*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), pg. 404; House Committee on International Relations, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *The Belgrade Followup Meeting to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: A Report and Appraisal*, Report, May 17, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., pg. 31, 74-75.

strengthened bilateral ties, mutual economic development, and gave the United States more exposure, influence, and leverage with the Polish government.<sup>289</sup>

On April 16, 1977, the Polish Minister of Foreign Trade met with Secretary of Commerce Juanita Kreps, and pointedly cited the fact that “over the past year or more,” the West Germans had given the Poles better trade terms than any other country – including the United States. Kreps indicated that Polish membership in the IMF was possible, which would thereby open up another source of loans and credits. She also reminded the Poles funding from the Export-Import Bank was available as “an expression of support...on the part of the American administration.”<sup>290</sup>

US Ambassador to Poland Richard Davies noted it was “only in Poland [of all the Eastern European countries] that we could hope to develop any trade...it was only with Poland that any businessman could think of doing any business, and consequently only in Poland could we get people who were prepared to go in there seriously.” US-Polish trade was political, not in the same way as human rights, but political nonetheless. It was designed to produce favorable outcomes for America. The Soviet saw economic cooperation between the US and Poland as acceptable and desirable. It helped stabilize its most strategic client state and would reduce Poland’s need for Soviet aid.

It was impossible, however, to separate trade policy from the push for human rights. On May 7, 1977, 19 year-old KOR member Stanislaw Pyjas was found beaten to death at his

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<sup>289</sup> “Polish-U.S. Exchange Lauded at LH College: Piper and Poland in Aircraft Co-op,” *Polish American Journal*, Vol. 66 Issue 4 (April 1977).

<sup>290</sup>The Ex-Im bank was seen by the administration as a particularly positive avenue to funnel aid to the Communist nation, given that its purpose was to facilitate the trade of American goods to parties not willing or able to finance its purchases by credit, thereby supporting American jobs; “Notes on Meeting with Minister of Foreign Trade Patolichev,” April 16, 1977, Juanita Kreps Papers, Box 25, Loose Material Folder, Duke University Archives.

dorm in Krakow. Although the government claimed that he had been killed by a fatal fall after a night of drinking, Pyjas' wounds did not match this story. Pyjas' death gave KOR and the dissident community renewed cause to act. In Krakow 5,000 Poles soon marched in the student's honor. Krakow's Archbishop Karol Wojtyla gave a stirring homily averring Pyjas had "fallen victim to the authorities' hatred of the democracy movement among the students." The incident saw a surge of students drawn into the burgeoning dissident movement. Some in the Polish government argued in favor of an immediate crackdown, even if this were to lead to the loss of Western economic credits. While the debate raged in Warsaw, eleven KOR members including Adam Michnik were jailed.<sup>291</sup>

Washington, too, was unsure as to how to proceed. One option being considered was a renewal of covert operations within Poland. For the first five months of 1977, Brzezinski's dream of a campaign in Eastern Europe had been tied down in red tape.<sup>292</sup> Chairing the May 10 meeting of the SCC, Brzezinski established a working group to examine covert measures targeted at the Eastern bloc. David Aaron, who led the group, told the participants later that day that Brzezinski had been "distressed" at the low level of activities aimed at the USSR and wanted proposals for action. Following the SCC meeting, the Covert Action Staff presented four plans. These included: distribution of *samizdat* or dissident titles, the establishment of a book publishing program and the subsidization of mostly Polish and Czech journals to be distributed in the cultural circles of Eastern Europe, the introduction of writings into the Soviet bloc emphasizing ethnic minorities and cultures, and American

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<sup>291</sup> RAD Background Report/151 (Poland), July 26, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in "Radio Free Europe Research," pg. 14.

<sup>292</sup> Letter, Adam Bromke to Zbigniew Brzezinski, 4/5/77, "CO 126 1/20/77 - 2/28/78" folder, Box CO-49, WHCF-Subject File, Jimmy Carter Library.

support for Western European groups seeking Soviet observance of human rights and democracy. While called covert, these plans were in fact white propaganda, a form of information warfare only slightly more clandestine than RFE.<sup>293</sup>

During working group meeting, Paul Henze recalled the State Department had been “lukewarm (if not downright cold)” about expanding overt and covert programs directed at USSR and Eastern Europe. However, Henze reported having done “a good deal of research on this subject among knowledgeable specialists,” and found “no shortage of ideas and widespread feeling that more should be done to support dissidents...But we won’t get very far on all this if we don’t overcome some of the bureaucratic inertia which is overly abundant in Washington.”<sup>294</sup>

Meanwhile, in Warsaw, Gierek commissioned a report on Poland’s social and economic problems. The report, submitted in July but not released until 1980, warned “only the most drastic” measures could turn the situation around. Among its recommendations: a moratorium on new investment projects, application for membership in the IMF, and a rescheduling of Poland’s debt. Each involved cooperation with Western Europe and the United States, which was put in jeopardy by the burgeoning opposition. A RFE situation report documented “increasingly strong attacks” on Polish intellectuals’ ties with the West following Pyjas’ death. The Polish party newspaper *Zycie Warszawy* said of the intellectuals: “all of them are marching forward to the drumbeat of Munich’s Radio Free Europe.” KOR

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<sup>293</sup> Gates, pg. 91-92.

<sup>294</sup> Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 10, 1977, DDRS.

leader Adam Michnik was excoriated in the state media for spending time in the West and writing material for RFE and the Paris-based *Kultura*.<sup>295</sup>

According to *The Economist*, while the long-term liberalization of Poland and Eastern Europe depended more on their own governments than the policies of the West, “the history of the dissident movement has demonstrated that the reaction of the west is something that Soviet policymakers have to take into account.”<sup>296</sup> The tripartite, if tentative, alliance of the workers, intellectuals, and the Church was proving hard for the Gierek government to subdue, and its successes encouraged the opposition to press further. Even the sporadic detention of KOR’s leaders scarcely stopped their prolific writing. With each jailing, Warsaw gave credibility to KOR’s claim of government lawlessness, and gave Wyszynski and the clergy material for their broadcast sermons. But KOR was aware of the limits of its dissent. Michnik explained, “We realize that in Poland today the Communist party must rule, and that Poland must stay in the Soviet bloc –we just want them to rule more justly. We want a dialogue with the party, not a clash.”<sup>297</sup>

Factions within the Polish Communist party were pressing “Gierek for a harder line toward dissent, and that these groups are sufficiently strong to warrant Gierek’s attention,” RFE reported. With students flocking to the dissident banner in the wake of the Pyjas

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<sup>295</sup> Sarah Meiklejohn Terry, “June 1976: Anatomy of an Avoidable Crisis,” in Jane Leftwich Curry and Luba Fajfer, eds., *Poland’s Permanent Revolution: People vs. Elites, 1956 to the Present*, (Washington: American University Press, 1996), pg. 137; Situation Report Poland/12, May 11, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research, 2:3, March-April 1977,” pg. 1-2.

<sup>296</sup> “Despite the KGB; The campaign for human rights can legitimately vary from outspoken to sotto voce, but the time for silence is past,” *The Economist*, June 18, 1977, pg. 14; Garthoff, pg. 631.

<sup>297</sup> Situation Report Poland/12, May 11, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research, 2:3, March-April 1977,” pg. 12-14; Situation Report Poland/13, May 20, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research, 2:3, March-April 1977,” pg. 1-3; Situation Report Poland/22, August 30, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research,” pg. 11; Cyrus Ernesto Zirakzadeh, *Social Movements in Politics: A Comparative Study*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pg. 99.

incident, it was clear that KOR had “considerable support, organization, and ideas...it is now up to Gierak to devise a strategy which keeps these new factors in mind.” Both the hardliners and the KOR-worker-Church alliance were racing to be first to attain critical mass, and thereby prevent the other from growing too strong to curb.<sup>298</sup>

Poland, a CIA report on the “Dissident Problem Since Helsinki” detailed, had many of the characteristics of a revolutionary situation: “a fragile economy...a military which might not prove reliable in a domestic crisis, a generally hostile population, and most important, an assertive working class whose interests are defended by two other elements – the Church and the intellectuals. If the lid should blow in Poland, the Soviets would have good cause to expect repercussions elsewhere in the bloc. CSCE had a catalytic effect on East European dissent, which has become a movement cutting across national borders.” As a result, the Kremlin was pressuring “the more moderate regimes to take a harder line toward dissidents,” and Poland was “vulnerable to pressure.”<sup>299</sup>

The CIA warned that if events spiraled out of control and a “major explosion” took place in Poland, Soviet military intervention was inevitable. The CIA felt Poland was too fragile to be the target of destabilizing policies. Gradual liberalization should be the goal.<sup>300</sup>

A May 18 meeting of the SCC also saw reservations from the State Department about the proposals for “covert action for Eastern Europe,” according to Henze’s evening report to Brzezinski. The policy planning staff under Anthony Lake “not only does not want to consider anything new in this area but would like to see everything that is going on now

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<sup>298</sup> Situation Report Poland/13, May 20, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research, 2:3, March-April 1977,” pg. 4.

<sup>299</sup> CIA Report (EO 12598), “The Soviet View of the Dissident Problem Since Helsinki,” May 1977, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 6-8.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, pg. iv, 1, 10, 14, 16.

stopped.” The State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research, as well as the European branch agreed, feeling “there is a case for new activity, though they do not see how it can be funded overtly. A memo has been sent to Vance to try to resolve the fundamental disagreements.” Henze elaborated his views in a memo to NSC Soviet expert Sam Huntington: “For the covert action we do, we need an improved planning mechanism and organizational arrangement that ensure creativity – at present our covert action capabilities are continuing to atrophy. Achieving this level of sophistication and cooperation would prove difficult, however.”<sup>301</sup>

With the Belgrade review conference looming, the Soviets were on the defensive. Moscow and its allies, the CIA noted, had “misjudged the impact of the human rights provisions” of the Helsinki Accords and were “anxious to prevent further Western exploitation of their weakness” by RFE and other Western media. In Poland, bowing to Soviet and internal pressures, the Gierek administration took a harder line. Late May saw Polish media launch a campaign accusing Western writers of spreading lies about Poland and focusing on “unimportant” stories such as the death of Pyjas, the dissidents, and KOR. RFE noted that Polish sensitivity indicated the importance of these stories; however, whether the campaign was meant “solely as a warning to correspondents in Poland or whether it has other purposes is difficult to determine.” *Polityka* editor Mieczysław Rakowski, a close ally and friend of Gierek, called for calm and cooperation to solve the nation’s problems, while Polish newspaper *Zycie Warszawy* captured the dire mood with its headline on May 28, “All

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<sup>301</sup> Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 18, 1977, DDRS; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 24, 1977, DDRS; Memo, Paul Henze to Sam Huntington, June 3, 1977, DDRS; Situation Report Poland/15, June 7, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research, 2:3, March-April 1977,” pg. 4.

Antennas Zeroed in on Poland.” The article, written by editor-in-chief Bogdan Rolinski, charged the West used KOR as its “oracle, if not the final judge,” in the Pyjas case and others. He described an “unprecedented hue and cry against Poland” as Western media rushed to paint Poland “a country of police terror” and persecution.<sup>302</sup> Yet it was precisely this image which the government’s response to KOR fostered when Gierek gave ground to the hardliners. Tensions remained high.

“Poland’s rulers have decided to hit hard and show that they will not tolerate any more opposition,” *The Economist* wrote on May 28. Arrests in Poland were trending upward. By threatening “older, better known” KOR members and jailing younger members like Kuron and Michnik, authorities hoped to frighten KOR into silence.<sup>303</sup>

At the June 6 Cabinet meeting, Carter stressed “we must develop a comprehensive, positive proposal” for the upcoming Belgrade conference, and “not just oppose suggestions made by others.” The President’s Second Annual Report to the US Helsinki Commission was presented by Cyrus Vance the same day. While Poland’s decision to grant amnesty to some of the jailed workers was praised, Warsaw’s increasing repression of KOR members was criticized. However, Poland’s sharing of economic and commercial information was seen as positive, as well as its participation in the cultural and educational exchanges and cooperation in reunification of families.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Rakowski would later be Prime Minister and the final First Secretary of Poland; CIA Report, “Soviet Objectives and Tactics at the Belgrade Conference,” May 1977, NLC-28-5-4-1-1, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Situation Report Poland/16, June 15, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research, 2:3, March-April 1977,” pg. 5-6. RAD Background Report/151 (Poland), July 26, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research,” pg. 8, 17.

<sup>303</sup> RAD Background Report/151 (Poland), July 26, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research,” pg. 15; “Poland; Break that link,” *The Economist*, May 28, 1977, pg. 56.

<sup>304</sup> “Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting, Monday June 6, 1977,” June 6, 1977, Juanita Kreps Papers, Box 23, Notes of the Cabinet Secretary 1977-78 Folder, 1 of 2, Duke University Archives; “Second Semiannual Report by the

Meanwhile, the US-Polish bilateral economic relationship quietly hummed along. Early in the year, the US Agriculture Department had extended \$227 million in loans for agricultural products. Chase Manhattan had loaned \$350 million to Poland's mining industry, while the Ex-Im Bank approved loans of \$7.9 million combined with a \$7 million loan from private banks for the purchase of machine tools. This helped Gierek's technocrats make their case for success. Punishing Poland for actions less repressive than that of its neighbors would be counterproductive for the United States, risk more unrest, and play to the hardliners.<sup>305</sup>

A major example of the US-Polish economic relationship was seen at the third session of the Polish-American Economic Council held in Warsaw from May 23-25. According to an RFE report, Carter, in a letter delivered by Ambassador Richard Davies, "specifically promised that the new administration will try to expand mutual trade. Edward Gierek has, in turn, acknowledged Carter's gesture and confirmed Poland's continued interest in new forms of bilateral trade." This was reinforced at 49<sup>th</sup> International Poznan Fair on June 12-21, where Congressman Dan Rostenkowski conveyed "the president's intention to tighten the bonds between the two states and nations and stressed that the development of economic co-operation will be an essential element in the consolidation of mutual relations." At the fair, Gierek expressed his desire to further develop a good relationship with the United States "within the context of peaceful coexistence" and primarily through economic

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President to the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe," submitted to the Committee on International Relations, June 1977, 95<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977), pg. 1-20.

<sup>305</sup> RAD Background Report/245 (Poland), December 12, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in "Radio Free Europe Research," pg.iv-v.

cooperation. The Polish leader also extended an invitation to Carter to visit Poland and “continue to develop Polish-USA relations.”<sup>306</sup>

This met US objectives, to press the Communist countries on human rights while simultaneously pressing forward on bilateral initiatives. The Eastern European states that resisted buckling to Soviet calls for repression would reap the economic rewards the United States had to offer. The Gierek government strove to expand bilateral ties to the United States and Western Europe while keeping Moscow content – and hoping that its opposition would not get too out of hand. By offering clemency to the nation’s political prisoners, Gierek was sending a message that Poland was a good place to do business, that he was a good leader...and still in charge.<sup>307</sup>

The Poznan trade fair was also an opportunity to display exhibits on American culture, manned by over a dozen American college students, many of Polish extraction who spoke Polish fluently. Richard Davies felt this was a potent application of soft power and said of students: “It just brings a breath of a different world. And that was the thing that so many of the visitors wanted to do - talk with these kids... Of course the Soviets have had reciprocal exhibits, but the impact of their exhibits here...we won hands down on that.” Although one

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<sup>306</sup> Interview with John Harrod, *Frontline Diplomacy*; Situation Report Poland/16, June 15, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research, 2:3, March-April 1977,” pg. 10-11; “News Highlights,” *Polish American Journal*, Vol. 66, Issue 8 (August 1977).

<sup>307</sup> House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *Implementation of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: Findings and Recommendations Two Years After Helsinki*, Report, September 23, 1977, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., pg. 36-37.; Situation Report Romania/23, July 19, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research,” pg. 7; Situation Report Hungary/31, September 26, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research,” pg. 7-8; Situation Report Romania/19, June 10, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research, 2:3, March-April 1977,” pg. 2.

cannot quantify this on a balance sheet, maintaining and increasing such contacts was widely seen as beneficial to American interests.<sup>308</sup>

In his June 24 weekly report to Carter, Brzezinski expressed the feeling of NSC Soviet expert Bill Hyland that, “Tactically, the Soviets may be seeking a period of quiet... Brezhnev also knows better than we do that the situation in Eastern Europe is not good, and that he may face an explosion in Poland. That possibility is the more likely if repression is intensified, but perhaps less likely if tensions seem to be receding.” The Belgrade conference provided an excuse for such a relaxation without a loss of face. All in all, the cautious Hyland felt that “We still have most of the high cards.”<sup>309</sup>

In late June, RFE issued a report “One Year After the Polish Price Protests.” The threat of worker discontent was now “more real in Poland than anywhere else in Eastern Europe.” RFE noted, “it is striking how flexibly party leader Edward Gierek reacted [in June 1976] to this increase in the influence of groups outside the party. Gierek’s approach has been to emphasize consultations and ‘socialist democracy’” to avoid further conflict.<sup>310</sup>

One of Gierek’s biggest challenges was figuring out how to deal with the Catholic Church, now part of an informal coalition with intellectuals and workers. The Church, at the same time, was “cautious about becoming openly involved in a dispute with the authorities.” Initially, the clergy were careful not to directly praise KOR. Rather, KOR members began

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<sup>308</sup> Interview with Richard Townsend Davies, Frontline Diplomacy.

<sup>309</sup> Weekly Report, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, June 24, 1977, NLC-SAFE 39 B-28-85-4-3, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; “Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting, Monday June 20, 1977,” June 20, 1977, Juanita Kreps Papers, Box 23, Notes of the Cabinet Secretary 1977-78 Folder, 1 of 2, Duke University Archives; “Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting, Monday June 27, 1977,” June 27, 1977, Juanita Kreps Papers, Box 23, Notes of the Cabinet Secretary 1977-78 Folder, 1 of 2, Duke University Archives; “Despite the KGB; The campaign for human rights can legitimately vary from outspoken to sotto voce, but the time for silence is past,” *The Economist*, June 18, 1977, pg. 14.

<sup>310</sup> RAD Background Report/132 (Poland), June 30, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research 2:3,” pg. 1-2.

publicly praising the Church's "nonconformist and dignified attitude [which] stimulates aspirations for ever greater civil liberties," in Michnik's words. According to RFE, "This turning toward the Church as a protector of civil liberties is a significant development, and it opens the door to further informal coalitions of interest between the two groups should similar issues arise." By pushing for continual but not radical reform, the tactical inclinations of the Church were in many ways similar to the United States Government. Both pushed harder for reform during periods of relative quiet and both valued stability. The Church desired to function as a societal mediator, biding time, consolidating its gains, and moving from a position of strength.<sup>311</sup>

However, hardliners in Poland had "grown in influence. They may still be far from the point where they could press their policies upon the party leader, but compared with the relative lack of opposition to Gierek during most of his time in power, this is a significant development." RFE wrote, "Unless Gierek succeeds in striking a new balance between party and people, the events of June 1976 will continue to have their destabilizing effect on the domestic political scene."<sup>312</sup>

At a June 30, 1977 meeting of the Polish Senate, Gierek delivered a major speech on human rights. Starting from the premise "that civil rights, their form and observance, are an internal affair of every state," he outlined the socialist view of human rights, wherein "without economic liberation and without guaranteeing the basic social rights, all declarations about equality and freedom become empty words." By criticizing Western

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<sup>311</sup> RAD Background Report/132 (Poland), June 30, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in "Radio Free Europe Research 2:3," pg. 8.

<sup>312</sup> RAD Background Report/132 (Poland), June 30, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in "Radio Free Europe Research 2:3," pg. 9.

unemployment, homelessness, poverty, and discrimination, Gierek averred that Poland was in fact furthering the most fundamental human rights. Gierek also highlighted Poland's tolerance for freedom of "conscience" and religion, as well as its desires for peace and "mutually beneficial international co-operation." Gierek attached so much importance to his speech that he had 100,000 copies distributed. The speech firmly placed Gierek and Poland within the Soviet orthodoxy in advance of the near certain debates of the Belgrade review summit and was designed to give the Polish leader political cover during a period of tension.<sup>313</sup>

In light of this tension, the CIA released a report titled "Probable Soviet Reactions to a Crisis in Poland" in June 1977. If unrest in Poland were to turn violent or threaten the Communist regime, Soviet intervention was seen as likely. The Agency argued a crisis might unfold "in the event that the economic situation became so insufficiently untenable that austerity measures would have to be strictly enforced." However, the report noted, the Soviet leadership had historically shown a "clear preference *not* to intervene."<sup>314</sup> Poland's physical size and homogenous society would make any intervention costly and messy. As well, the hostile anti-Russian and anti-Soviet leanings of much of the citizenry added to the costs. At the same time, Poland's vulnerable location and extreme strategic importance for Soviet strategic plans meant that an intervention could not be ruled out.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Situation Report Poland/18, July 11, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in "Radio Free Europe Research," pg. 7; RAD Background Report/151 (Poland), July 26, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in "Radio Free Europe Research," pg. 19.

<sup>314</sup> CIA Report (RP 77-10141CX), "Probable Soviet Reactions to a Crisis in Poland," June 1977, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. I.

<sup>315</sup> CIA Report (RP 77-10141CX), "Probable Soviet Reactions to a Crisis in Poland," June 1977, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. II.

This was complicated, the report wrote, by the fact that the Russian-Polish relationship had been a long story of conflict, and Poles had “come to regard civil disobedience and opposition to foreign occupiers and alien political systems as essential patriotic virtues. At the same time, this legacy has taught them to make the best of what they cannot avoid, to become masters of the grapevine in defiance of censorship, and to look to the Roman Catholic Church as the basis of national identity.”<sup>316</sup>

With little room for maneuver, Gierek would increasingly feel the allure of repressive measures, despite the fact that “any major mistake could again send the Poles into the streets, thereby substantially raising the probability of a new Polish leadership and possibly inviting Soviet intervention.” The CIA determined that “the disbelieving, often hostile Polish people, their wary leaders, and church authorities can count on each other to keep unrest contained.” The US had to play its hand carefully. Not enough pressure and the dissident movement might be crushed. Too much instability in Poland, and the Soviets would intervene. Avoiding this was paramount, and this was best achieved by ensuring the protests in Poland did not cross the Rubicon. The CIA, like Vance and many in the State Department, wanted to play it safe. Gierek had thus far been able to pursue a program of restraint toward KOR and the Polish dissidents – but Soviet patience was not unlimited and the hardliners were gaining strength. At the same time, in light of the rapidly approaching Belgrade conference, *The*

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<sup>316</sup> CIA Report (RP 77-10141CX), “Probable Soviet Reactions to a Crisis in Poland,” June 1977, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. 1, 5-10; Flora Lewis, “Poland is Not An Exact Fit in Eastern Mold...,” *New York Times*, Jan. 23, 1977.

*Economist* argued the West “can hardly be expected to keep quiet when they see Polish intellectuals being thrown into jail for trying to help victimised strikers and their families.”<sup>317</sup>

Although the Belgrade review conference of the Helsinki Final Accords would not open until October, the important preparatory conference began work on June 15. The chief goal of the preparatory session was to set the agenda for the main conference in October. This in itself would require major negotiation, particularly with regard to the timetable for the conference. Those nations who wanted extensive discussion on human rights compliance, chiefly the United States, wanted an open-ended conference. The Soviets and East Europeans wanted a shorter conference with a definite end date – which would allow them to run out the clock. One American participant complained this would amount to a mere “show and tell.”<sup>318</sup>

With Belgrade looming, the Polish government released all 10,000 political prisoners from jail on July 20. This was a reversal of the heightened repression seen after the Pyjas incident. According to Polish historian and future Solidarity leader Bronislaw Geremek, Gierek, “did not want to be seen as a ‘mobster’ before the Belgrade Conference. He was also vitally concerned with maintaining Poland’s good reputation of “preserving access to Western financial markets.” This was a major moment for Poland’s dissidents. Afterwards,

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<sup>317</sup> CIA Report (RP 77-10141CX), “Probable Soviet Reactions to a Crisis in Poland,” June 1977, CIA FOIA Reading Room (online), pg. II, 10-14; “Poland; Break that link,” *The Economist*, May 28, 1977, pg. 56.

<sup>318</sup> The Congressional United States Helsinki Commission, all members of which were a part of the United States Belgrade delegation, released its retrospective report on the conference in May 1978. Given that the particular records of the preparatory meeting, which began on June 15, and the main conference in October were closed to the public and not officially transcribed, the Congressional report is a valuable insight into the American perspective of the meeting; House Committee on International Relations, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *The Belgrade Followup Meeting to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: A Report and Appraisal*, Report, May 17, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., pg. 8.

as Timothy Garton Ash noted, “they retained enough freedom to solidify the links between KOR, the workers, and the Roman Catholic Church. A revolution had begun.”<sup>319</sup>

*The Economist* proclaimed that Poland had given the USSR a lesson, “that a harried Communist regime can make a few concessions to free speech without destroying itself in the process.” Gierek had decided to defy his political opponents, despite the “obvious risks in opening the door to a little more free speech, especially in a country like Poland where the national temperament is not exactly conducive to political self-restraint.” If Gierek’s gamble paid off, he might gain the Western support needed to stabilize the Polish economy. Tad Szulc, writing in *Foreign Policy*, noted that “In Poland...dissidents are convinced that the government’s July 1977 decree of amnesty for all political prisoners was a result of the Carter campaign and the approach of the Belgrade conference. Whether this is true cannot be proved, but as a Western diplomat in Warsaw said, ‘So long as people think so, it’s all to the good, because it reinforces your president’s stand on human rights.’”<sup>320</sup>

The unexpected clemency garnered praise and a conciliatory tone from Wyszynski’s pulpit. The Cardinal called for Poles to remember “social peace depends on respect for basic human and civil rights...We fear anything that might be a violation of human rights today, as this might give birth to a new unrest tomorrow.” RFE reported Church leaders felt this “a time for caution and reserve than for challenge and confrontation,” and that this could indicate a “moderation in official policy toward the civil rights movement.” The detentions had become “an embarrassment to the Polish leadership,” who until May, “had reacted rather flexibly to KOR and its activities.” Gierek in particular had taken a careful stance, warning

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid, pg. 13-16; “If Poland can, why can’t Russia?,” *The Economist*, July 30, 1977, pg. 39; Vaughan, “Helsinki Final Act,” pg. 20.

<sup>320</sup> “If Poland can, why can’t Russia?,” *The Economist*, July 30, 1977, pg. 39; Szulc, pg. 182.

against overreacting to the dissident movement and thus empowering it. As RFE put it, “Gierek, it seemed, had the wind blowing at his back.” The moderates had seized the initiative from the hardliners and reasserted themselves.<sup>321</sup>

Gierek found in clemency a “welcome device for saving Poland from embarrassing political trials parallel to the Belgrade review conference.” The Polish authorities even phoned journalists to make sure they were informed of the decision. The Polish state needed legitimacy, a quality which was as scarce as that of any consumer good. With an official, if not necessarily convincing official explanation of Pyjas’s death on file and with all of the nation’s political detainees freed, the Polish government was attempting to remove any pretext for KOR to continue its activities. It was, however, far too late for this.<sup>322</sup>

On July 6, the NSC’s Gregory Treverton submitted to Brzezinski his report on possible diplomatic initiatives toward Poland. The Polish government “felt that they had to restrain their own dealings with the US in case the Soviets decided to adopt a more hostile tone towards the United States in their public utterances.” Another restraining factor was the lack of initiatives open to the United States in Poland, “reflecting our limited leverage in Eastern Europe but also reflecting the peculiar mix of relations with Poland: relatively low levels of trade (by comparison to the Western Europeans) but a relatively high degree of cultural interaction.” Treverton wrote that diplomatic gestures would likely comprise most of the available options, “and they may suffice as signals of our interest.” However, as the “most Western-looking” of the East European states, Poland “should qualify for special

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<sup>321</sup> Situation Report Poland/16, June 15, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research, 2:3, March-April 1977,” pg. 1-4; Situation Report Poland/20, August 1, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research,” pg. 2.

<sup>322</sup> Situation Report Poland/20, August 1, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research,” pg. 3-6.

treatment,” such as a meeting of Vance with the Polish Foreign Minister at the UN General Assembly, receiving Gierek in Washington the following year, and sending the Vice President to Poland.<sup>323</sup>

Soviet pressure on East European regimes continued as the summer stretched on. Poland moderated its views on Eurocommunism, moving toward the Soviet position. Gierek endorsed Brezhnev’s position, as RFE noted, “in order to gain the Soviet leader’s full support” for his handling of the internal situation in Poland and to outflank the party hardliners at home. Gierek’s instinct was to offset his lenient attitude toward the dissidents and liberal economic policies by taking orthodox, pro-Soviet positions on many foreign policy issues, thereby giving himself latitude and maneuvering room with Moscow.<sup>324</sup>

Carter wrote in his diary on August 10, “In general our progress on foreign affairs has been minimal, but we’re moving with a well-planned effort on a broad basis, and I intend to be quite persistent in pursuing our goals.”<sup>325</sup> Slow, steady progress was being made. One example was reflected in an August 10 memo from the Situation Room to Bill Hyland, the NSC officer for the USSR and Eastern Europe. The Polish weekly *Polityka*’s had printed a letter from Ambassador Davies defending Carter’s stand on human rights, which had been described in the weekly as “loaded down with hypocrisy.” CIA analysts noted the letter had provoked a “flood” of responses and held that the unusual decision to print the letter “may

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<sup>323</sup> Weekly Report, Gregory Treverton to Zbigniew Brzezinski, June 30, 1977, NLC-6-64-5-15-4, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Memo, Gregory Treverton to Zbigniew Brzezinski, July 6, 1977, NLC-6-64-5-14-5, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library.

<sup>324</sup> Situation Report Hungary/26, August 2, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research,” pg. 4; Situation Report Poland/21, August 16, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research,” pg. 6-7.

<sup>325</sup> Carter, *White House Diary*, pg. 81.

reflect Warsaw's willingness to tone down"<sup>326</sup> its criticism in order to maintain good relations with Washington. Perhaps the administration's policy was having the desired effect.<sup>327</sup>

On August 18, Gierek told Senator McGovern (D-SD) that he wanted to buy five million tons of grain from the United States in 1978, twice the current allotment. Gierek also spoke to the possibility of joining the IMF. At subsequent bilateral meetings, the NSC expected the Poles to also seek increased Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) credits, relaxed terms on existing credits, and the resumption of PL-480 grain shipments.<sup>328</sup>

The United States had three main economic levers it could apply to Poland: CCC credits, PL-480 credits, and financing through the Export-Import Bank (Eximbank). CCC credits guaranteed US agricultural exports to buyers who could not secure the necessary credit from other sources. The repayment window for CCC credits was typically three years, but could be much longer. PL-480 guaranteed a long-term supply of agricultural products for nations which could not produce enough for domestic consumption. Arrangements could last up to thirty years. Eximbank credits were extended for endeavors such as the purchasing of industrial and machine parts; Poland had used them throughout the decade. In an attempt to

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<sup>326</sup> Memo, Situation Room to William Hyland, August 10, 1977, NLC-1-3-3-35-6, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Memo, William Hyland to President Carter, August 11, 1977, NLC-1-3-4-1-2, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library.

<sup>327</sup> Since 1976, Poland had received a \$300 million credit agreement from Canada for grain purchases, over £150 million in private loans from UK firms, \$475 million in total credits from Italy, and over \$110 million from the Netherlands. The Shah of Iran visited Poland from August 22-26 and during that time signed an extensive new round of bilateral economic trade agreements; RAD Background Report/245 (Poland), December 12, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in "Radio Free Europe Research," pg. I-IV; Situation Report Poland/22, August 30, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in "Radio Free Europe Research," pg. I, 6-12.

<sup>328</sup> The Commodity Credit Corporation is a New Deal Agency created to "stabilize, support, and protect farm income and prices." It functioned like an Ex-Im bank for the agricultural sector, facilitating exports and production; "About the Commodity Credit Corporation," USDA, <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/cc/>; Evening Report, Robert Hormats, Tim Deal to Zbigniew Brzezinski, August 22, 1977, NLC-10-4-6-13-6, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Evening Report, Situation Room to Zbigniew Brzezinski, October 11, 1977, NLC-SAFE 17 B-5-24-2-1, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library.

control debt, the Polish government had suspended the projects Eximbank credits covered and sought credits through the CCC and PL-480 programs. The Carter Administration favored shorter-term CCC credits and wanted to avoid the long-term commitment PL-480 credits carried a possibly unstable client. While US government policy was to strengthen stability in Poland, the Administration wished to keep as much flexibility as possible. This would also, like the Helsinki review conferences, keep Poland in the hot seat and accountable to the American government.<sup>329</sup>

During the summer, the Carter Administration codified its East European and Soviet policy in two Presidential Directives. An August 23 meeting of the Policy Review Committee endorsed interacting with East European states via a “polycentrist relationship, with the axis based on US interests” rather than their relationship with Moscow. This would create a “reciprocally advantageous” bilateral framework that would avoid forcing “the East European countries to retrench to a collective position.”<sup>330</sup>

On August 24, Carter signed Presidential Directive 18 on US national strategy. The document, still classified in half, called for a mix of “competition and cooperation” with the Soviet Union through economic programs, cultural competition, and arms control. This officially ratified the blended approach that Carter had signaled back in Chicago in 1976. PD-18 signaled continuity with the de facto strategy toward Eastern Europe, which was enshrined in Presidential Directive 21 on Eastern Europe policy on September 13. PD-21

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<sup>329</sup> Agenda, Policy Review Committee Meeting, November 22, 1977, NLC-15-40-1-3-7, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; “Food Aid Programs,” USDA, last modified April 14, 2008, <http://www.fas.usda.gov/excredits/FoodAid/Title%201/pl480ofst.html>; “About the Commodity Credit Corporation,” USDA, last modified August 20, 2008, <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/cc>; “Loan Guarantee & Direct Loan,” Eximbank, last modified February 7, 2007, [http://www.exim.gov/products/loan\\_guar.cfm](http://www.exim.gov/products/loan_guar.cfm).

<sup>330</sup> Agenda, Policy Review Committee, August 23, 1977, Brzezinski Materials, Box 64, Poland: 1/77-10/78 Folder, Jimmy Carter Library; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pg. 297; Korey, pg. 68.

called for the United States to work “with governments of the region to enhance their independence internationally and to increase their internal liberalization.” Washington would show preference for regimes that liberalized. Poland would “continue to receive preferred treatment with regard to visits by government officials, and in handling economic issues and various exchange programs.” Brzezinski explained to *Time* that “We wanted to show that the road to Eastern Europe did not necessarily lead through Moscow.” State Department official Charles Gati explained to the House that PD-21 signaled that “the United States should cultivate a closer relationship with Eastern Europe for its own sake rather than as a byproduct of détente with the Soviet Union.” This was a function, Gati felt, of the more confident, assertive, post-Vietnam mood.<sup>331</sup>

The Eastern Europe policy, according to Gati, “represents the application of the administration’s human rights policy,” especially provisions that the United States “should maintain regular contacts with representatives of the loyal opposition in Eastern Europe – liberal intellectuals, artists, and church leaders as well as Government officials.” Gati felt that this “points to a new departure in American policy toward Eastern Europe” and that the Carter Administration deserved praise and support for encouraging evolutionary change in the region, and for clarifying American policy in spite of the limited leverage at hand. Gati recommended the coordination of US trade policy toward Poland with the Western Europeans, as well as continuing improvement of the radio agencies. According to Gati, it

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<sup>331</sup> Presidential Directive, “U.S. National Strategy,” PD/NSC-18, August 24, 1977, pg. 1-2; Presidential Directive, “Policy toward Eastern Europe,” PD/NSC-21, September 13, 1977; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pg. 297; House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *U.S. Policy Toward Eastern Europe*, Hearing, September 7 and 12, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1978, pg. 68-74; “Nation: Carter tries a new tack toward Eastern Europe,” *Time*, June 12, 1978.

was “hard to overemphasize the continuing importance of Radio Free Europe,” which had become an “active ingredient of the political life of Eastern Europe.”<sup>332</sup>

Gati did admit a danger in RFE, “our main instrument of communication with the people in the region,” creating the “false impression” that the United States was “either unaware or unappreciative of some of the moderate measures enacted” in Poland by giving coverage if not endorsement to the gamut of dissident critiques to Gierek. Gati predicted that Eastern Europe’s long-term development would continue to be pro-Soviet in foreign policy but increasingly pluralistic domestically, which would create long-term stability. Carter’s policies supported this trajectory.<sup>333</sup>

The House also heard from Dr. James Brown, director of research and analysis of RFE since 1969, who rated Poland’s human rights record as second behind Hungary, citing police repression of KOR and worker activists but positively noting “the society of Poland – with the Church as the great alternative center of power, is a more independent society than any other in Eastern Europe.” Poland also remained “America’s largest East European trading partner.”<sup>334</sup>

In Poland, both the Church and KOR were growing bolder. On September 3, in what RFE termed a “dramatic effort to seek a truce with the Church,” Gierek appealed for “fruitful cooperation” with the ecclesiastical authorities. Sources within the Polish clergy called Gierek “the first Communist leader to acknowledge the importance of the Church’s role in

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<sup>332</sup> House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *U.S. Policy Toward Eastern Europe*, Hearing, September 7 and 12, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1978, pg. 73.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 69-75.

<sup>334</sup> House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *Implementation of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: Findings and Recommendations Two Years After Helsinki*, Report, September 23, 1977, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., pg. 5, 36-37, 53.

Poland on such a scale,” and on September 9, Church officials called for authorities to “fully respect civil rights.”<sup>335</sup>

On September 29, KOR announced that it would change its name from the Committee for the Defense of the Workers to the Committee for Social Self-Defense, officially cementing its shift away from a group of intellectuals protesting the jailing of the June 1976 rioters toward a persistent human rights organization dedicated to defending all elements of Polish society from governmental abuse. KOR had gained prestige over time as a result of the measures leveled against it, each crackdown strengthening its cause.<sup>336</sup>

### **The Belgrade Conference**

After much anticipation, the Belgrade Review Conference opened on October 4, 1977. As a symbol of its importance, Carter appointed Arthur Goldberg as his personal representative and head of the US delegation. Goldberg had wide experience as Secretary of Labor under Kennedy, and as a Supreme Court Justice and Ambassador to the United Nations under Johnson. The Soviet Ministry for Foreign affairs called Goldberg “fanatical,” and a “dangerous, powerful opponent, a polemicist inclined to aggravating situations, to sharp fights,” and forecast that the United States would “make a big turn to...human rights in their bourgeois interpretation.”<sup>337</sup> In his opening speech on October 6, Goldberg stated Carter’s view “that a deepening of détente, a healing of the divisions of Europe, cannot be

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<sup>335</sup> Situation Report Poland/27, November 9, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research,” pg. 2-3.

<sup>336</sup> Situation Report Poland/25, October 13, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research,” pg. 3-9.

<sup>337</sup> House Committee on International Relations, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *The Belgrade Followup Meeting to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: A Report and Appraisal*, Report, May 17, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., pg. 13; John Fry, *The Helsinki Process: Negotiating Security and Cooperation in Europe*, (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1993), pg. 33.

divorced” from the discussion of human rights. At the same time, he moved to assure the delegates that the United States sought “non-polemical, straightforward, and detailed review of implementation,” and that its aims were peaceful and cooperative.<sup>338</sup>

The Belgrade Conference unfolded in three stages: from October through mid-November a line-by-line review of the Helsinki Final Act was conducted, followed by a month of discussion of new proposals before the holiday recess on December 22. After reconvening on January 17, 1978 attempts to draft a concluding document ran until the close of the conference on March 9. The first phase was the major focus of the United States, its allies, and many of the non-aligned nations. During this phase, American negotiators cited positive trends in Poland, including the general amnesty of 10,000 individuals involved in the June 1976 disturbances, as well as increased Polish cooperation with the State Department on family reunification cases. While some sessions grew quite heated, Poland was not singled out for criticism.<sup>339</sup>

The citation of specific incidents threw the Soviet delegates on the defensive. However, during discussions over free access to information the Soviet delegates departed from their defensive stance and leveled condemnation on RFE/RL. In what the Helsinki Commission called “the most acrimonious exchanges” of the entire negotiations, an American delegate charged, “What really bothers our colleagues is not that these radios are located on foreign territory or that they broadcast in foreign languages. I can’t believe that

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<sup>338</sup> Cable, Embassy Belgrade to Secretary of State, October 1977, NLC-10R-5-5-1-0, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; House Committee on International Relations, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *The Belgrade Followup Meeting to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: A Report and Appraisal*, Report, May 17, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., pg. 20, 51-52; Fry, pg. 33; Korey, pg. 17, 63-64, 78.

<sup>339</sup> House Committee on International Relations, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *The Belgrade Followup Meeting to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: A Report and Appraisal*, Report, May 17, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., pg. 7, 13-16.

these countries are so weak, or so unsure of themselves that they really think that activity of these radios will cause their governments to fall or cause them lots of internal activities.” In fact, this was precisely what the Communist nations feared, because as one delegate noted “people learn from the radios.” Goldberg himself pointedly criticized the “continuing interference” and jamming of foreign broadcasts. Due to East European reluctance to press the issue, the Soviet attack on the radios was soon spent.<sup>340</sup>

Although Belgrade ultimately disbanded without issuing more than a simple document that amounted to the parties agreeing to disagree, the United States saw the conference as a success. Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs George Vest asserted that at Belgrade, “we and our allies...conducted a full, candid, but non-polemical discussion of the record of all the signatories of the CSCE Final Act” and used the opportunity to remind Moscow and Eastern Europe of “the importance of human rights in East-West political relations, and to underscore the fact that human rights are a legitimate subject for international consideration.”<sup>341</sup> By merely raising the issue of human rights in a prominent international setting, the Americans felt they had won the battle of ideas and the moral high ground. At the same time, it was crucial that the United States had worked with its allies in Western Europe and with non-aligned nations to present a united front on compliance. Belgrade, like Helsinki before it, was important not only because of the

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<sup>340</sup> House Committee on International Relations, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *The Belgrade Followup Meeting to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: A Report and Appraisal*, Report, May 17, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., pg. 33-35; Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, October 13, 1977, DDRS; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, November 1, 1977, DDRS; Korey, pg. 81.

<sup>341</sup> House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *Review of Recent Developments in Europe, 1978*, Hearing, January 31, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1978, pg. 5.

documents it produced but as part of a continuous process that codified human rights internationally.<sup>342</sup>

While the Belgrade conference was carried out, the quiet work of diplomacy continued apace. On October 18, Foreign Minister Gromyko arrived in Warsaw on a highly publicized visit. This was for Gierek part of an active season of foreign policy visits through which he hoped to gain legitimacy from hardliner and dissident alike. Gierek had visited France in September, welcomed the Shah in August, and received the Belgian royal family in October. Following the meetings with Gromyko, Gierek was also slated to visit Rome in November and receive Carter in December. These visits and meetings reinforced his image as an important world leader. By securing favorable trade deals with major players such as France and Iran, Gierek could legitimately claim to his hardliners and to Moscow that without his leadership Poland's economic and political prospects would suffer.<sup>343</sup>

In Washington, covert initiatives were still being considered by the Special Coordination Committee. Since May, the proposals had "moved excruciatingly slowly through the interagency process and through CIA," recalled Robert Gates. The State Department, which opposed the initiatives, had saddled the CIA "with enough paperwork to keep it busy for years," essentially guaranteeing a procedural logjam. At the October 26 SCC meeting, however, the expanded book production and distribution programs proposed in

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<sup>342</sup> House Committee on International Relations, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *The Belgrade Followup Meeting to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: A Report and Appraisal*, Report, May 17, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., pg. 47-49; Interview with Max Kampelman, Frontline Diplomacy.

<sup>343</sup> Situation Report Poland/25, October 13, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in "Radio Free Europe Research," pg. 19.; Carter, *White House Diary*, pg. 132, 143; Interview with Philip M. Kaiser, Frontline Diplomacy; Evening Report, Reginald Bartholomew to Zbigniew Brzezinski, November 25, 1977, NLC-10-6-7-16-0, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Situation Report Hungary/34, November 22, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in "Radio Free Europe Research," pg. 11.

March were approved. These would soon be put into effect in Eastern Europe “aggressively” by the CIA, and constituted even in their limited form what Gates called “an unprecedented White House effort to attack the internal legitimacy of the Soviet government.”<sup>344</sup>

This initiative occurred at a time when Poland’s political culture was flourishing. Independent publications of all types multiplied, and even some small publishing houses had appeared. The “Flying University” also began operation in the fall of 1977, meeting in apartments to discuss all topics. The Flying University was accompanied by a decentralized underground library to distribute banned books to those interested in expanding their political understanding.<sup>345</sup>

These measures supplemented the cultural contacts arranged by the State Department and the Embassy in Warsaw. However, many Poles were unhappy with the US Embassy, which Henze noted did “nothing to support them, and in fact helps the regime by isolating them [the dissidents]...Bill Griffith tells me everything he says about the lethargicness of our Warsaw Embassy is quite correct – and he believes it is important to get a good new ambassador soon.”<sup>346</sup> This was echoed in another memo to Brzezinski citing “little confidence in the embassy” which had “poor contacts” with the opposition.<sup>347</sup>

Arnold Horelick, a National Intelligence Officer for the Soviet Union, wrote to the head of the CIA’s analytical directorate, Robert Bowie, on November 18 concerning

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<sup>344</sup> Gates, pg. 92-93.

<sup>345</sup> Jakub Karpinski, *Countdown: The Polish Upheavals of 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, 1980*, (New York: Karz-Cohl Publishers, Inc., 1982), pg. 200.

<sup>346</sup> Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, November 11, 1977, DDRS.

<sup>347</sup> Memo, Reginald Bartholomew to Zbigniew Brzezinski, November 11, 1977, NLC-10-6-5-9-0, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Memo, Robert Bowie to Policy Review Committee, November 15, 1977, NLC-132-66-5-9-8, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Evening Report, Reginald Bartholomew to Zbigniew Brzezinski, November 25, 1977, NLC-10-6-7-16-0, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Interview with Leslie M. Alexander, [Frontline Diplomacy](#).

Brzezinski's continued investigation "on what more could be done via CIA against Soviet and East European targets." Horelick wrote, "It is not clear to anyone in this building (CIA) what Zbig may have had in mind; I do not exclude the possibility that he had not thought that much about it before hand."<sup>348</sup> On November 21, Horelick again wrote to Bowie, expressing his opinion that, "In present circumstances, US policy interests in fostering greater East European worker discontent, especially in Poland, are at least ambivalent (and some would say that they are directly contradictory)."<sup>349</sup> Given the track-record of past East European uprisings, Horelick, like many others, preferred stability over undermining the Eastern bloc.

Henze had meanwhile been writing Brzezinski on the same topic, reporting, "Last February [1977], when State expressed reservations about continuation of CIA's meager covert operations directed at the USSR and Eastern Europe, you suggested State study overt possibilities while, meanwhile, CIA consider modest expansion of selected activities. State did nothing. CIA, suffering from internal confusion, was slow to move but during the course of the summer came up with a number of proposals for expansion. [redacted] CIA is going ahead with this expansion. State continues to be unenthusiastic about it." The State Department wanted to rely on overt action, and was leery about using émigré organizations as a means to cover such operations.<sup>350</sup>

After the flurry of activity early in the year, the Carter administration's Polish policy was more subtle. *The Economist* saw "Mr Carter...undertaking to slow down" after a frantic spring of foreign policy initiatives and a subsequent legislative logjam in Congress. One

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<sup>348</sup> Vaughan, "Helsinki Final Act," pg. 20.

<sup>349</sup> Vaughan, "Helsinki Final Act," pg. 20.

<sup>350</sup> Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, November 18, 1977, DDRS; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, November 28, 1977, DDRS.

major exception was Carter's proposed international tour, purportedly the "brainchild" of Brzezinski which Vance called a "waste of time" (he denied this). Besides allies such as France and regional players such as India and Iran, Poland was included on the itinerary – the only Communist country on the tour. Marshall Shulman, the State Department's Soviet Affairs adviser, advised Vance to oppose the stop in Poland as too provocative to the Soviet Union, while Brzezinski favored Poland in the hope that it "would encourage the processes of liberalization that were gathering momentum there." According to Brzezinski's memoirs, Carter was negative toward an alternative stop in Romania, stating Poland "was clearly the most important country in Eastern Europe and it made much more sense for him to go there."<sup>351</sup>

### **Economic Assistance to Poland**

On November 4, NSC expert Robert King sent Brzezinski a memo that cited several policy concerns to be resolved before Carter's meeting with the Polish leadership, particularly the need to craft a response to Polish requests for a \$400-500 million long-term grain purchasing deal and for favorable credit terms. Another question was the US position on the question of rescheduling Poland's debt. King noted that "there is presently no program in existence" where the number of credits on the terms the Poles were seeking could be obtained without new legislation or a major reshuffling of existing programs. The Department of Agriculture, and to a lesser extent the Department of State, were opposed to such a deal, although Agriculture was studying a compromise measure to provide Poland

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<sup>351</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pg. 297; "The slowing of Jimmy Carter," *The Economist*, November 5, 1977, pg. 35; Interview with Charles Gati, in Vaughan, "Helsinki Final Act," pg. 22.

some credits on fair terms. The entire affair was tricky, King observed, because “whether we help the Poles with their debt is as much a political as an economic question.”<sup>352</sup>

Poland would have an increasingly difficult time borrowing from the West, although Warsaw maintained access to “sizable government-guaranteed credits” and would continue to receive \$425 million in aid from special West German payments through 1978. West Germany was at any rate anxious to bring in other creditors.<sup>353</sup> Gierek had also succeeded in the past in gaining “above-plan Soviet deliveries of oil and the resumption of Soviet grain deliveries,” but this could no longer be counted upon.<sup>354</sup> The NSC, Treasury, and State Departments agreed broadly and “questioned the appropriateness” of a long-term grain agreement with Poland given the “decision to focus on multilateral approaches to grains trade and liberalization of trade barriers.”<sup>355</sup>

As part of the planning for Carter’s trip to Poland, the CIA released a formal study on the Polish economy and the possibility of debt rescheduling. The study cited Austria, France, the United Kingdom, West Germany, and the United States as Poland’s largest creditors, with the American share of the debt at \$501 million. Of this, \$121 million were Eximbank credits, \$166 million CCC credits, and \$214 million PL-480 credits. If rescheduling became necessary, the CIA report felt that the Poles would approach the Austrians, French, or the

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<sup>352</sup> Memo, Robert King to Zbigniew Brzezinski, November 4, 1977, DDRS.

<sup>353</sup> Memo, Robert King to Zbigniew Brzezinski, November 4, 1977, DDRS; CIA Report, “Soviet and East European Relations with the US and the West,” November 1, 1976, CIA FOIAA Reading Room (online), pg. 22-26.

<sup>354</sup> CIA Report, “Soviet and East European Relations with the US and the West,” November 1, 1976, CIA FOIAA Reading Room (online), pg. 16.

<sup>355</sup> Memo, Guy Erb to Brzezinski, November 18, 1977, NLC-29-34-3-5-5, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library.

British before the United States, from whom it hoped to seek more concessionary credits in the near future.<sup>356</sup>

The Poles did just that, signing a 500 million DM deal with West Germany on August 29, what RFE called “the largest credit operation in the history of trade between Poland and the FRG.”<sup>357</sup> Nevertheless, *The Economist* saw further West German credits unlikely in the face of opposition from German unions and workers. “All Mr Schmidt can really do is nudge West German companies to arrange more joint business ventures with Poland.”<sup>358</sup> In Rome, Gierek signed long-term trade deals worth \$360 million.<sup>359</sup> “Poland has been able to secure, often very astutely,” RFE detailed, “preferential [economic] treatment” despite the growing indications that “foreign bankers and merchants who must cover their own outlays are now laying down stricter rules.”<sup>360</sup> Gierek had sought assistance from nearly every avenue open for economic aid. It was still far short of what would be necessary to correct Poland’s severe economic imbalances, however.

With another holiday season of potential unrest approaching, *The Economist* observed that the Polish Church had the power to “virtually ensure Mr Gierek's political survival during the coming winter of possibly violent Polish discontent over meat and other shortages.” The Church now functioned as “a potential ally against anarchy” rather than a

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<sup>356</sup> Congressional figures had Poland’s CCC credits for 1976 at \$205 million; CIA Report, “Poland: Possible Rescheduling of Hard Currency Debt,” November 10, 1977, NLC-31-32-8-3-1, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Senate Committee on Finance, Subcommittee on International Trade, *Problems in International Agricultural Trade*, Hearing, July 13, 1977, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., pg. 87; Garthoff, pg. 461.

<sup>357</sup> Situation Report Poland/28, December 2, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research,” pg. 7.

<sup>358</sup> “Poland; Romeward bound,” *The Economist*, November 26, 1977, pg. 58.

<sup>359</sup> Situation Report Poland/29, December 13, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research,” pg. 4.

<sup>360</sup> RAD Background Report/245 (Poland), December 12, 1977, Radio Free Europe Research, in “Radio Free Europe Research,” pg. 7-8.

“powerful reactionary opponent, to be fought with all available means.” When a Polish bishop was asked in Rome how the Polish Church was faring, he remarked, “Oh fine. You see, we are no longer enemy number one. The workers are.”<sup>361</sup> While in many ways the Church and the workers held similar goals, the Church wanted the government to see it as a moderating force with which it could negotiate. Just as Poland’s leaders aspired to “mediate” between the Eastern and Western camps, so, too, did the Polish Catholic Church seek to carve out its own sphere of influence.<sup>362</sup>

In Washington, the Policy Review Committee met on November 22 to discuss the Polish situation. It was agreed Poland had a higher potential for instability than at any time since December 1970 – and possibly October 1956. Therefore, “US policy toward Poland thus takes a greater potential significance than it might in other circumstances.” The NSC, State, Treasury, and Commerce Departments favored increasing CCC credits to Poland, although not in the volume the Poles desired. All were against additional PL-480 credits. Secretary Kreps was directed on her upcoming trip to Poland to determine “whether the Polish government would be able to utilize additional CCC credits.” It was agreed that during the Kreps and Carter visits, American officials would, if pressed, indicate willingness to offer Eximbank credits, a long-term grain purchasing agreement, the US support for a “coordinated approach” to debt rescheduling, and US support for Polish membership in the IMF and the World Bank. Membership in these international organizations would encourage

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<sup>361</sup> “Poland; Romeward bound,” *The Economist*, November 26, 1977, pg. 58.

<sup>362</sup> A. Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, pg. 228; Wozniuk, pg. 44.

Poland to maintain internal freedoms in order to maintain access to new loans and credits.

The PRC concluded that “It is to our advantage to have Poland in the IMF.”<sup>363</sup>

Bolstering Gierek’s government would be crucial and timely. A report from the National Foreign Assessment Center noted a severe weakness in the government. Gierek, the report explained, was doing “what he can to keep tempers down,” and that the dissidents “have acted with considerable restraint,” even if the possibility of worsening trouble remained. At the same time, Polish party hardliners were growing stronger and the CIA felt that Gierek’s “support in the country has been badly eroded.”<sup>364</sup>

For the remainder of the year planning for Carter’s trip dominated thinking about policy toward Poland. Henze noted in his annual report that the Administration had “sought to put new life into RFE/RL to enable the radios to play a major role in furthering the cause of human rights...and to give them the strength to compete for listeners and gain effectiveness in the years ahead.”<sup>365</sup> At the same time, Henze also reported on December 9 that Gronouski was establishing a “close and totally cooperative working relationship with the RFE/RL corporate board and the radios’ management.” The working relationship between these bodies was being smoothed out with Gronouski’s careful diplomacy. At the staff level, RFE/RL had been “on a starvation diet necessitating severe personnel cutbacks and restrictions on operations which reduced impact and effectiveness,” but late in the year the Office of Management and Budget secured “major increases” in the RFE/RL budget,

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<sup>363</sup> Agenda, Policy Review Committee Meeting, November 22, 1977, NLC-132-66-6-6-0, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Evening Report, Henry Owen, Guy Erb, Tim Deal to Zbigniew Brzezinski, October 11, 1977, NLC-SAFE 17 B-5-24-2-1, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library.

<sup>364</sup> CIA Report, “Eastern Europe Weekly Review,” November 29, 1977, NLC-31-30-7-1-6, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library.

<sup>365</sup> Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, December 9, 1977, DDRS.

which would permit higher staffing levels, better reporting, and improved programming. There was general agreement on the “value of RFE/RL as instruments of foreign policy,” and with the harmful Congressional initiatives defeated, the “basic control of the U.S Government over [the radios] has been reaffirmed and the basis has been laid for steady improvement in performance – both in terms of transmitter power and programming impact.”<sup>366</sup>

U.S policy-makers were tense, however, about the Polish economic situation. Henze wrote to Brzezinski on December 12, stating a further deterioration of the situation in Poland might see the Polish leadership reshuffled or even replaced en masse, “which would be highly adverse to our interests in Eastern Europe,” given that any new government would very likely be filled with hard-liners with little independence from Moscow. “Consequently,” Henze wrote, “the next six months could be critical for the survival of the Gierek regime.”<sup>367</sup>

Covert activity in Eastern Europe was still stymied, as evidenced by a mid-December meeting of Paul Henze with Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Europe William Luers, with whom Henze reported “making a little progress in developing new proposals.” Luers was trying to contact American publishers about producing more works in Russian and East European languages.<sup>368</sup>

### **Carter’s “16,000 mile journey”**

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<sup>366</sup> Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, December 9, 1977, DDRS.

<sup>367</sup> Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, December 12, 1977, NLC-10-7-3-12-7, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, December 16, 1977, DDRS.

<sup>368</sup> Although not discussed in the memo, this likely included smuggling banned titles into Eastern Europe, long a favored covert tactic for cultural warfare and a very low risk/cost option at that. This may have been possible in part due to large budget of the Warsaw embassy’s Cultural Affairs division. Anna Romanski, the Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer, recalled being told constantly to order paperbacks, which “were pretty inexpensive in those days and did not make much of a dent in the budget; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, December 19, 1977, DDRS; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, December 21, 1977, DDRS; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, December 27, 1977, DDRS.

The White House had announced on September 23 that Carter would embark on a foreign tour, including a stop in Poland, from November 22 to December 2, but this soon proved impossible. While Carter had signed the Panama Canal Treaty and convinced Congress to create the Department of Energy, ratification of the treaty and the passage of Carter's centerpiece energy legislation were proving difficult. An overworked Congress had been combative, shredding Carter's proposals for force reduction in Korea, and the Bert Lance scandal and resignation was an unwelcome distraction.<sup>369</sup> A *Time* magazine article noted, "There is no better tonic for a President in trouble than a tour of the horizon aboard Air Force One." Yet whether the trip would occur at all was in doubt. With his energy legislation in jeopardy in Congress, Carter put off the event until late December in order to fulfill his threat "to sacrifice his trip abroad for the sake of a last-minute, all-out onslaught on Capitol Hill."<sup>370</sup>

On December 1, Brzezinski sent a memo to Carter outlining small Polish concern over the upcoming Presidential visit. The decision was said to have caused "considerable puzzlement and anxiety in Polish party and government circles." Gierek and the moderates hoped the trip would grant them legitimacy and economic aid. The White House did plan to grant new aid and it could be useful to signal this in advance. If it were public knowledge that the trip would have an economic focus, "expected displays of public enthusiasm for you could be more easily explained to the Soviets." The Polish government feared an overly positive public reaction to the US president would damage its standing with Moscow. One week later, Brzezinski cited a State Department analysis warning of rising instability in

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<sup>369</sup> "Digest of Other White House Announcements," September 23, 1977, [American Presidency Project](#).

<sup>370</sup> Aaron Brown, "The Pains of Withdrawal: Carter and Korea, 1976-1980," thesis, North Carolina State University, 2011; "The Nation: Carter Decides to Stay Home," [Time](#), Nov. 14, 1977.

Poland which had the potential to “generate episodes that would heighten tensions in our relationship with Moscow.”<sup>371</sup>

Secretary Kreps reported at the December 5 Cabinet meeting on her visit to Poland the previous week to discuss agreements on “tourism, small business, industrial cooperation, and technological information.” While negotiations in these areas were progressing, Kreps didn’t expect final agreements to be ready in time for the President’s visit later that month. She anticipated that President Carter “will be asked to extend Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) credits...the Poles are looking forward to his visit, and that they expressed a genuine desire to work with us.” In the same meeting, Brzezinski explained that while in Poland, “the President will discuss economic relations; Central European security; East/West matters; and family reunification. Human rights themes will also be discussed.”<sup>372</sup>

In the initial press conference about the trip on December 9, Carter described American aims towards the Warsaw Pact, noting, “We want to maintain our sales of agricultural products grown in this country to the so-called Eastern European countries,” which would help the struggling US farm sector. He recalled that the “most pleasant surprise” of his presidency had been the worldwide impact of his human rights policy, which in his words had caused leaders to think, “Before we take action, what is the world going to think about me, the way I’m dealing with political prisoners or out-migration or the

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<sup>371</sup> Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, December 1, 1977, NLC-SAFE 17 B-6-30-8-7, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Weekly Report, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, December 9, 1977, NLC-SAFE 16 A-41-89-1-3, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library.

<sup>372</sup> “Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting, Monday December 5, 1977,” December 5, 1977, Juanita Kreps Papers, Box 22, Notes of the Cabinet Secretary 1977-78 Folder, 1 of 2, Duke University Archives; Memo, Robert King to Zbigniew Brzezinski, December 6, 1977, DDRS; Evening Report, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, December 7, 1977, DDRS.

reunification of families or the persecution of human beings?"<sup>373</sup> In light of Poland's relatively positive behavior, the chance to receive a sitting President was a powerful reward and a needed boost for the embattled Gierek. The visit would single out Poland – not as a center of instability but as a powerful international player, a good place for business, and it would boost Gierek's image as a moderate but effective leader.

In a subsequent press conference, Carter stated that dissidents in Eastern Europe "know where we stand," although the President made sure to add the caveat that he had no wish to tell others what "political or social systems they should have," the president noted his intent to continue to "press the subject of human rights...it's very important that an American President indicate our interest in Eastern European countries." He cited close US-Polish ties and the strong trade relationship to argue "my presence there is just as important as is the presence of President Brezhnev when he visits a nation like France or Germany...we will be discussing a broad range of questions with Poland."<sup>374</sup>

Robert King and Tim Deal wrote Brzezinski in advance of a PRC meeting on Poland to be held on December 15. They outlined the President's goals, which were: support domestic stability in Poland, encourage "the evolution toward internal liberalization, respect for human rights, and the pluralistic tendencies in Polish society." Citing Kreps' report, they referred to the economic component of these political goals. The State and Treasury Departments were both in favor of extending CCC credits to Poland. The amount likely to be available would be far less than the Poles desired, but the Administration could make the deal

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<sup>373</sup> "Interview With the President Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With a Group of Editors and News Directors," December 9, 1977, [American Presidency Project](#).

<sup>374</sup> "The President's News Conference of December 15, 1977," [American Presidency Project](#).

“more attractive by playing up the consultative mechanism and reiterating prior assurances of continued access to the US market for a favored customer.”<sup>375</sup>

Brzezinski felt that the trip to Poland would “encourage the process of liberalization that was gathering momentum there.” It would be different than the visit by Nixon and Kissinger “on their way home from the 1972 Moscow summit.”<sup>376</sup> Rather than an afterthought, Poland would be a central part of Carter’s foreign trip. In fact, Brzezinski indicated Poland’s importance when he delineated no less a strategic country than Iran as a stopover point between the more major meetings in Poland and India.<sup>377</sup> US Ambassador to Poland Richard Davies, disagreed, calling it a “lunatic trip” logistically. Worse, Brzezinski had “got the idea that the President would come there and there would be a big meeting with the dissidents,” specifically KOR. Davies recalled being asked by Marshall Shulman, Vance’s adviser on the Soviet Union, to try to talk Brzezinski out of this.<sup>378</sup> Jack Seymour, Polish desk officer at the State Department, recalled that Brzezinski, who “was known as the real Polish desk officer,” pushed very hard for Carter to meet with Cardinal Wyszynski, an idea which gave the Poles, as well as Davies, more than a little heartburn. Seymour explained that Brzezinski wanted to “play [the Cardinal] up and emphasize the political diversity in Poland.” Ambassador Davies registered his strong caution over this; he predicted that the

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<sup>375</sup> Memo, Robert King/Tim Deal to Zbigniew Brzezinski, December 14, 1977, DDRS; Memo, Robert King/Tim Deal to Zbigniew Brzezinski, December 14, 1977, DDRS.

<sup>376</sup> Vaughan, “Helsinki Final Act,” pg. 20-21.

<sup>377</sup> “Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting, Monday December 5, 1977,” December 5, 1977, Juanita Kreps Papers, Box 22, Notes of the Cabinet Secretary 1977-78 Folder, 1 of 2, Duke University Archives.

<sup>378</sup> According to Davies, Brzezinski was adamant about the President meeting with dissident leaders – an impossibility to Davies, who suggested a press conference with Polish and American journalists. This was in fact exactly what happened. Davies recalled the tension between the NSC and State Department staffs lasting almost until the eve of Carter’s arrival, and the Ambassador threatened to resign after reports leaked to the Poles of Carter’s plan to “slip out” and meet dissidents during planned staff time; Interview with Richard Davies, Frontline Diplomacy.

Polish government's reaction would be quite negative. Soon after, Brzezinski cabled Davies and pledged to work out an alternative. What was clear, however, was that even within the State Department, "we planned to press hard on human rights," according to Seymour.<sup>379</sup>

A final PRC meeting on US-Polish relations before the trip was held on December 16. It was decided that the Poles should be given additional \$200 million CCC credits on top of the \$300 million already slated for 1978.<sup>380</sup>

On December 17, the White House issued a summary of the administration's first-year achievements, among which the strengthening of human rights policy and improved goodwill towards Poland was detailed.<sup>381</sup> Carter praised Poland's freedoms in an interview with Tom Brokaw, stating "we will have a good meeting, I think, in Poland."<sup>382</sup> On the morning of his departure he expressed a hope that the trip would "nourish the improving relationships between the United States and the people of Eastern Europe."<sup>383</sup>

The State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research Analysis completed a report on December 28 titled "Poland on the Eve of the President's Visit." INR wrote that following "a period of relative quiet on the dissident front throughout most of the fall, dissident activities became increasingly bold," provoking a reaction so mild in nature it suggested "Gierek is not prepared to resort to harsher repressive measures just before

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<sup>379</sup> Interview with Jack Seymour, Frontline Diplomacy.

<sup>380</sup> Evening Report, William Hyland to Zbigniew Brzezinski, October 12, 1977, NLC-10-5-5-9-1, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Report, Policy Review Committee Meeting, December 16, 1977, NLC-15-40-1-4-6, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library; Memo, Robert King to Zbigniew Brzezinski, December 23, 1977, DDRS.

<sup>381</sup> "Administration's First-Year Accomplishments Summary of Domestic and National Security and Foreign Policy Accomplishments," December 17, 1977, American Presidency Project.

<sup>382</sup> "Conversation With the President Remarks in an Interview With Tom Brokaw of NBC News, Bob Schieffer of CBS News, Robert MacNell of the Public Broadcasting Service, and Barbara Walters of ABC News," December 28, 1977, American Presidency Project.

<sup>383</sup> "The President's Overseas Trip Remarks on Departure from the White House," December 29, 1977, American Presidency Project.

President Carter's visit." INR anticipated a "tenuous calm" for the coming weeks, and noted that although Carter would likely receive a "tumultuous welcome in Poland," the Soviets would not be disturbed as long as the net plus of the visit was to strengthen Gierek's hold on the country. "The Soviets have always been willing to tolerate some signs of special US interest in Poland," INR wrote, "so long as that was likely to reduce the potential economic pressures on the USSR."<sup>384</sup>

On December 29, Carter left for Poland, embarking on the highly publicized tour to Poland, Iran, India, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, France, and Belgium. But the "16,000 mile journey" began with Poland. As the American delegation arrived in Warsaw for its three-day visit, it was welcomed by torrents of rain, biting wind, and freezing temperatures. Awaiting the delegation was a steely honor guard, the Polish *apparatchiks*, and a silent hand-picked crowd of "people we trust," as one Pole told the *Chicago Tribune*. In the welcoming ceremony with Secretary Gierek, Carter stressed the "ancient and strong" links between the United States and Poland and spoke of a new world "in which old ideological labels have lost their meaning and in which the basic goals of friendship, world peace, justice, human rights, and individual freedom loom more important than ever." Reporters made note of the cool reception, part weather and part strict government staging to ensure no disruptions, but the scene belied the Poles' strong desire for better relations. Outside the security cordon, crowds gathered at the entrance and at intersections along the motorcade route. The only sign of discontent was the single sign along the route held aloft by a group of students which read, "We count on you America. Do not let us down." As the presidential motorcade approached

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<sup>384</sup> INR Report, "Poland on the Eve of the President's Visit," December 28, 1977, NLC-4-9-2-2-4, RAC, Jimmy Carter Library.

the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Warsaw Palace for a state dinner, a crowd of 100 dissidents shouted “Carter, Carter, save us, save us.” At the dinner, Gierek praised the movement towards the SALT agreement and arms reduction, and the continued ties between Poland and America. Interestingly, Gierek also referred to the Helsinki Final Accords, “which we treat as the Magna Carta of peace in Europe. Guided by its principles, we are favorably shaping up our bilateral relations with all states, signatories of the Final Act to take efforts to achieve positive results of the Belgrade meeting.”<sup>385</sup>

During the trip, Carter “appealed to Gierek to use his influence in Moscow to improve East-West relations,” according to Adam Bromke. While the President was in meetings the following day, Rosalynn Carter and Zbigniew Brzezinski slipped out to visit the powerful Cardinal Wyszynski, “the symbol of Polish commitment to the spiritual and political traditions of the West,” Primate of Poland, and mentor to the future Pope John Paul II.<sup>386</sup> While Cyrus Vance had warned against this and particularly the idea of the President visiting the Cardinal, Brzezinski went ahead with the ninety-minute meeting and he delivered a letter from Carter assuring the Cardinal, “You have my prayers and respect, I share your faith, I admire what you represent. I seek the same goals.”<sup>387</sup> Brzezinski wrote in his memoirs, “The Cardinal himself makes a first-rate impression – thoughtful, intelligent, combination of a theologian, a sociologist, and a patriot.”<sup>388</sup> Carter posited at the press

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<sup>385</sup> “Warsaw, Poland Toasts of the President and First Secretary Gierek at a State Dinner, December 30, 1977,” *American Presidency Project*; Edward Walsh, “Gierek Greets Carter Warmly at Warsaw Airport,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 30, 1977, pg. A1; Bill Neikirk, “Warsaw ‘cool’ to Carter,” *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 30, 1977, pg. 1; Bill Neikirk, “Carter to Poles: We’ll never start war,” *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 31, 1977, pg. 1.

<sup>386</sup> Clerical rank within the Catholic Church; the Primate serves as the “first among equals” for the bishops of a particular country.

<sup>387</sup> Interview with Adam Michnik, in Vaughan, “Helsinki Final Act,” pg. 21-22.

<sup>388</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pg. 298.

conference later that day that his wife's and NSC adviser's call on the Cardinal had been "an expression of our appreciation for the degree of freedom to worship in this country."<sup>389</sup>

At the concluding press conference, the first televised news conference in a Warsaw Pact state of an American president, Carter answered questions from Polish and American journalists. When questioned about his 1976 campaign comment on the domination of Poland, Carter sidestepped and expressed his country's "hope" for an autonomous, independent Poland "free of unwanted interference and entanglements with other nations." When pressed again as to whether he considered Poland to be dominated, President Carter politely but definitively declined to comment. One subject Carter did feel comfortable elaborating on was the Helsinki Final Act, which he said required "an insistence upon maximum enhancement and preservation of human rights." Carter then responded to a follow-up question on Poland's reform record positively, noting "substantial" freedom of the press, religion, and exchange between Poland and the West "in trade, technology, cultural exchange, student exchange, tourism." While he offered little criticism of the Polish government, he did avow the need to "insist upon a rigid enforcement and interpretation" of the Basket Three provisions.<sup>390</sup> In his single critique, the president did note the absence of dissident reporters and pledged to answer their questions, which were mainly on the topic of enforcement of the Helsinki agreement, later in writing.<sup>391</sup>

Carter offered American support for those struggling in the opposition, and also made the important announcement that he had just informed Secretary Gierek of the authorization of \$200 million dollars in food and grain credits in addition to the \$300 million in credits

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<sup>389</sup> "The President's News Conference of December 30, 1977," [American Presidency Project](#).

<sup>390</sup> "The President's News Conference of December 30, 1977," [American Presidency Project](#).

<sup>391</sup> Bill Neikirk, "Carter to Poles: We'll never start war," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 31, 1977, pg. 1.

already extended. The president stressed the beneficial trade relationship with the United States. “About 4 years ago we had a total trade with Poland of only about \$500 million,” Carter explained, in 1978 he estimated that trade between the two nations would exceed \$1 billion dollars. The subtext was crystal clear: we will reward moderate governments. Follow Poland’s example and relax the repression of your subjects and technology, capital, and prestige will be yours.<sup>392</sup> Radio Free Europe aired Carter’s press conference in Poland with simultaneous translation and covered Brzezinski and Mrs. Carter’s visit with Wyszynski, a story which the local media virtually ignored.<sup>393</sup>

While the opposition had been denied access to Carter’s press conference, they were allowed to supply written questions which Carter answered before his departure. One exchange in particular was telling:

*Opinia:* If movements and parties independent of the Government of Poland began to engage in activity in Poland, would that, in the President’s opinion, have influence on the policy of *détente* in Europe – and if so, what sort?

*Carter:* I think it inappropriate for me to comment on the internal politics of another country. I do, however, also feel that *détente* must involve not only governments but also be supported and encouraged by non-official individuals and groups.<sup>394</sup>

Carter was willing to support the dissidents, but only to a point. The leaders of KOR, a sophisticated crowd, understood. Michnik later said, “Carter’s visit was completely different. Brzezinski, in a very clear way, referred to the Home Army tradition [non-Communist resistance group under the Nazis]. Brzezinski met with Wyszynski, and this was the first signal that that there was an ‘other’ Poland rather than Poland of Gierek and the Communists. On television, Carter used the expression ‘the countries under Soviet

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<sup>392</sup> “The President’s News Conference of December 30, 1977,” *American Presidency Project*.

<sup>393</sup> BIB, Annual Report 1979, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1979), pg. 14.

<sup>394</sup> Peter Raina, *Political Opposition*, pg. 542-544; Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, pg. 228.

domination,’ – and it was the first time that Poles had heard something like this. In short, it was a visit of hope.” Carter wrote in his diary on December 29-30, “We’ve just left Poland. We got along well with First Secretary [Edward] Gierek and the Polish officials.” He described discussions with the Polish government on arms reduction, force reduction, and the continual crop failures in Poland. “We’re trying to help them,” he wrote, referencing the extension of agricultural credits. “The entire visit was delightful.”<sup>395</sup>

Carter’s trip in late 1977 sent mixed signals to human rights observers. Carter warmly praised Poland’s modest allowances for freedom. This was in keeping with PRM-28’s advice to use public statements positively in order to reward favorable behavior, using negative statements only sparingly. At the same time, the visit was seen to possibly “have strengthened the cause of freedom in Eastern Europe.” Carter’s news conference in Warsaw was said to have had a “major impact” on the Polish population. East European governments were aware of the favored treatment they might expect for respecting human rights. Poland’s receipt of half a billion dollars in grain was testament to this. This left the Administration open to charges that it was coddling a “human rights violator,” but, as Brzezinski argued, it was important to “have sought to reward those nations that evolved toward a more liberal internal political system.”<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> The Home Army was the largest resistance movement in Nazi-occupied Poland. The Home Army took part in the famous Warsaw Uprising, where the Red Army deliberately left the Home Army to slaughter. In postwar Poland, the Home Army was an important part of Polish nationalism; Interview with Adam Michnik, in Vaughan, “Helsinki Final Act,” pg. 21-22; Carter, *White House Diary*, pg. 155.

<sup>396</sup> Raymond D. Gastil, *Freedom in the World: Political Rights and Civil Liberties, 1978*, (New York: Freedom House, 1978), pg. 65; Szulc, pg. 182; Brzezinski, “U.S. Policy Toward Poland,” pg. 318.

As the presidential entourage returned to the United States, Carter hoped that the trip to Poland would augur that the Iron Curtain was being opened “for good,”<sup>397</sup> and felt that the visit to Cardinal Wyszynski was an example of a “pluralism in the Polish society that is not frequently acknowledged in an eastern European country. It’s obvious that as far as the influence on the minds and hearts and future of the Polish people that there’s a sharing between a great religious leader and the political leader.” When asked by the press why he had not himself visited the Cardinal, the president blamed diplomatic formalities, saying the contact and exchange of notes through Brzezinski was adequate. Carter was satisfied that the “trip that was symbolic of the power and influence and the good will of the United States.”<sup>398</sup>

KOR leader Bronislaw Geremek would later write about Carter’s visit: “It was so important in the way in which it was organized. The Polish authorities tried to obtain from the Carter visit a sense of legitimacy. They did obtain it, paradoxically enough, with the Nixon visit, but not with the Carter visit. Brzezinski’s concept of keeping contact with the Polish society saw two very powerful figures meeting with not only an opposition leader, but the spiritual head of Poland. That changed the context in a very important way. Even before John Paul II came to the Vatican this visit gave a national and political dimension to the church – that was the beginning of a process –with the Pope’s visit in 1979 – that was the preparation of the appearance of the Solidarity movement.”<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> “The President’s Overseas Trip Remarks on Arrival at the White House,” January 6, 1978, [American Presidency Project](#).

<sup>398</sup> “The President's Overseas Trip Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters on Board Air Force One en Route to the United States, January 6, 1978,” [American Presidency Project](#).

<sup>399</sup> Interview with Bronislaw Geremek, in Vaughan, “Helsinki Final Act,” pg. 23.

### **Conclusion: The Delicate Balance**

The possibilities for American policy are by no means limited to holding the line and hoping for the best. It is entirely possible for the United States to influence by its actions the internal developments, both within Russia and throughout the international Communist movement, by which Russian policy is largely determined.<sup>400</sup> – George Kennan

Jimmy Carter's Polish policy was formalized almost accidentally as a result of Ford's campaign gaffe and its initial shape owed much to Brzezinski's thinking. In late 1976 and early 1977, Polish policy quickly developed into a program that although nuanced and two-pronged, had a singular purpose: encourage stable, sustainable, and continual political liberalization within Poland. The dual policy would support the dissident opposition through a combination of human rights, Radio Free Europe, public rhetoric, and cultural exchanges while also stabilizing the moderate Polish government with an array of credits and economic incentives. It de-centered diplomatic emphasis away from Moscow toward Warsaw, and targeted rhetoric toward the Polish leadership *and* the Polish people. Poland was a unique East European country in that it exhibited both a large, active political opposition (the largest in Eastern Europe, in fact) and a moderate, technocratic leadership.<sup>401</sup> Both of these groups were seen as partners in reform, and US-Polish policy aimed to encourage the former to press for continual, reasonable reform and the latter to engage with and make moderate concessions to their citizens – all while attempting to deter radical dissidents and government hardliners alike from taking rash and destabilizing steps.

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<sup>400</sup> George Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Spring 1987), pg. 867.

<sup>401</sup> As well as a powerful, entrenched Catholic Church and farmer and merchant classes that were semi-independent; Bronislaw Misztal and J. Craig Jenkins, "Starting from Scratch Is Not Always the Same: The Politics of Protest and the Postcommunist Transitions in Poland and Hungary," in J. Craig Jenkins and Bert Klandermans, eds., *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives on States and Social Movements*, (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1995), pg. 161.

In a post-1956, post-1968, post-Vietnam era, it was clear that the use of force was not a possible means to secure Eastern Europe's liberation from communist rule; Carter and his advisors had taken these lessons to heart. By 1977, the United States had limited influence and tools to wield in Eastern Europe. The Polish policy sought to make the best of this situation and leverage soft power in a new way. Radio Free Europe, human rights, cultural exchanges, and other mechanisms were consciously employed not only to increase American influence and goodwill within Poland, but to erode the communist edifice in Poland. Carter's policy was not borne out of naïve idealism but out of *realpolitik*; it was a means to aggressively compete with Moscow ideologically. It grounded American strategic goals in classic American ideals and international treaties like the Helsinki Accords. Although the public has largely forgotten it, Carter was as committed a cold warrior as any – the Polish policy is a window on the way Carter fought the cold war. It was a low-cost, low-risk foreign policy.

Each prong of the Polish policy was a means to fight the Soviets, who feared political pluralism in Eastern Europe almost above all. Whereas RFE and human rights were intended to support and encourage the dissidents, the United States enticed Gierek and his government to remain, at least peripherally, in the Western orbit through a framework of economic credits, trade agreements, and business, scientific, and industrial exchanges that would bolster the Polish economy and give legitimacy to a communist government which from time to time tried the patience of Moscow. This was different than the policies of Nixon and Ford, who also emphasized such economic ties in the hopes that a stable Eastern Europe would strengthen *détente*, as they thought that the cold war could only be ended through Moscow.

Carter encouraged a closer relationship with Poland in order to maximize its independence from the USSR and to cultivate an economic dependence upon Western markets. This openness would itself allow Western and American culture and ideas to filter into Poland. Both Gierek and the dissidents defied the Soviet trend, and American policy bolstered each in their efforts.

Carter's strategy came to be one of "reciprocal accommodation" of the Soviet Union, best described in a December 28, 1978 memo from Zbigniew Brzezinski as based on: "1) containment; 2) resistance to indirect expansion; 3) ideological competition; 4) and the creation of a framework *within which* the Soviet Union can accommodate with us, or face the prospect of isolating itself globally." Brzezinski wrote Carter that by tapping "the global yearning for human rights," the president had crafted a policy which "provides an effective response to Soviet ideology," and "increases the moral appeal of the United States." The United States was putting pressure on Poland to loosen its domestic repression through a combination of sticks and carrots. It was attempting to undermine the Soviet hold on Eastern Europe without foregoing the possibility of cooperation on arms control and economic initiatives.<sup>402</sup>

J.F. Brown, deputy director of Radio Free Europe from 1976-1978 wrote that "nobody has done more to keep Eastern Europe, qua Eastern Europe, within the purview of American attention" than Brzezinski. Under the policy of differentiation, the Carter administration engaged Poland independently and on its own merit. Brzezinski wrote in his

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<sup>402</sup> Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter," December 28, 1978, Brzezinski Materials Box 42, Folder: Weekly Reports, 82-90, Jimmy Carter Library, cited in Christian Philip Peterson, "Wielding the Human Rights Weapon: The United States, Soviet Union, and Private Citizens, 1975-1989," dissertation, Ohio University, 2009, pg. 143.

memoirs that American policy attempted to “advance the larger goal of gradually transforming the Soviet bloc into a more pluralistic and diversified entity.”<sup>403</sup> While this was not a radical departure in American strategy, it was a given a new emphasis under Carter.

Adam Michnik cited the Carter administration’s support for KOR as a turning point for the Polish opposition, and he argued that it was crucial that Carter’s worldview departed from that of Nixon and Kissinger, who “had a vision like Metternich. That is ‘we divide the world into spheres of influence and we talk with governments.’ But Brzezinski understood what hardly anybody could understand at that time in America – that an ideological confrontation with the Soviet bloc had to be undertaken, and that the American slogan should be ‘human rights.’”<sup>404</sup>

By striving to deal directly with East European leaders and peoples, Carter changed the tenor of US relations with the Warsaw Pact. Brzezinski told *Time* that “we wanted to show that the road to Eastern Europe did not necessarily lead through Moscow.”<sup>405</sup> The assertion of Solidarity leader Bronislaw Geremek is worth repeating:

It was thus extremely important to us that [the Carter administration]...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.<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pg. 300; J.F. Brown, *Eastern Europe and Communist Rule*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), pg. 108-109.

<sup>404</sup> Interview of Adam Michnik, in Patrick Vaughan, “Zbigniew Brzezinski and the Helsinki Final Act,” in Leopoldo Nuti, *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: from Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), pg. 16.

<sup>405</sup> “Nation: Carter tries a new tack toward Eastern Europe,” *Time*, June 12, 1978.

<sup>406</sup> Interview of Bronislaw Geremek, in Patrick Vaughan, “Zbigniew Brzezinski and the Helsinki Final Act,” in Leopoldo Nuti, *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: from Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), pg. 13-14.

Victor Hugo once wrote “an invasion of armies can be resisted; an invasion of ideas cannot be resisted.”<sup>407</sup> The Carter administration attempted to “sustain domestic support for our policies by rooting them clearly in our moral values.”<sup>408</sup> Drawing from the perspectives of Vance, Brzezinski, and others, Carter supported the rights and aims of the dissidents through a multitude of sources, the most important of which was Radio Free Europe. Carter’s RFE expansion program was easily enacted as administration allies overcame Congressional opposition. Covert action toward Poland and Eastern Europe was increased. As Gates has argued, Brzezinski, with Carter’s approval and support, set up an “ambitious agenda of covert action,” which saw “a significant increase in the quantity of dissident and Western information and literature smuggled into Eastern Europe and the USSR.”<sup>409</sup>

Assistant Secretary of State George Vest argued that at Belgrade “we and our allies...conducted a full, candid, but non-polemical discussion of the record of all the signatories of the CSCE Final Act” and used the opportunity to remind Moscow and Eastern Europe of “the importance of human rights in East-West political relations, and to underscore the fact that human rights are a legitimate subject for international consideration.”<sup>410</sup> West German State Secretary Gunther Van Well commented in 1978 that Belgrade “has been at attempt at a new kind of approach in international relations.”<sup>411</sup> Poland and Hungary, which had been only mildly criticized at Belgrade, reportedly pushed the Soviet Union toward a

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<sup>407</sup> Victor Hugo, “History of a Crime,” [Project Gutenberg](http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1476554&pageno=338), pg. 338,

[http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk\\_files=1476554&pageno=338](http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1476554&pageno=338).

<sup>408</sup> Bennett Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges: The United States and Eastern Europe*, (New York: NYU Press, 1991), pg. 175.

<sup>409</sup> Gates, pg. 94.

<sup>410</sup> House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *Review of Recent Developments in Europe, 1978*, Hearing, January 31, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1978, pg. 5.

<sup>411</sup> Korey, pg. 98.

more moderate posture, and remarked to a neutral diplomat that “they hoped this will spill over well after everyone’s left Belgrade and Helsinki is only a memory.”<sup>412</sup>

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State William H. Luers told a congressional hearing in 1978 that the Soviets were now “reluctant to use military power, and they are prepared to tolerate a good deal more diversity than they were 10 or 15 years ago.” American policy was “to be cooperative with the individual countries of Eastern Europe, to move at a pace which is comfortable to them in their relations with us and the Western world, to provide them the opportunity to promote their own diversity and their own pluralism.”<sup>413</sup> If the Polish government chose reform – modest, realistic reform – the United States would support it. Vest said the trip to Warsaw “demonstrate[d] the potential for gradual progress.” Another witness testified: “illustrative of these efforts were President Carter’s precedent-setting news conference in Warsaw, which was heard by a broad spectrum of the Polish people,” as well as the meeting of Brzezinski and Rosalynn Carter with Cardinal Wyszyński.<sup>414</sup>

The December trip to Warsaw was indeed a dramatic success. It encapsulated the success of Polish policy in supporting the aims of both the moderate elements of the KOR-worker-Church opposition and of Gierek’s government itself. It demonstrated that this policy was *not* a contradiction. Carter was criticized at home for being too friendly with Gierek, but the dissidents in Poland did not see it this way. Like the Carter administration, they did not want to trigger a crackdown or a Soviet invasion. They saw Carter’s visit as empowering and as an affirmation of American support for their goals – they saw it in Carter’s speeches, in

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<sup>412</sup> Korey, pg. 99.

<sup>413</sup> House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Europe and Middle East, *Hearings on U.S. Policy toward Eastern Europe*, Sept. 7, 12, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> cong, 2d sess, pg. 41-46.

<sup>414</sup> House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *Review of Recent Developments in Europe, 1978*, Hearing, January 31, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1978, pg. 5, 117.

the visit to Wyszynski, in the press conference, in his very presence. The visit underscored Poland's important strategic position and the importance of having a moderate leadership in power. Gierek saw American support in the timely announcement of economic aid and the high-profile visit of a sitting American president during a time of uncertainty, a trip which garnered Gierek needed legitimacy.

The Polish government did fear the American stress on "soft power." Polish Defense Minister Wojciech Jaruzelski, who would as First Secretary impose martial law to squash the Solidarity trade union in 1981, recalled in an interview with historian Patrick Vaughan that the "peaceful engagement" strategy Brzezinski had pushed, "was very dangerous. Indeed, it was far more dangerous than that proposed by any other American politician or political scientist." In an interview in 1979, former US Ambassador to Poland Richard Davies echoed this sentiment, recalling that the Soviets and Poles from the outset "had great doubts about Jimmy Carter because of Zbigniew Brzezinski...and the human-rights campaign worried them greatly."<sup>415</sup> The influence of RFE and the Helsinki Accords was nigh impossible for the Polish government to counter. Jaruzelski respected that, while Brzezinski sought "principal changes in Poland," the Carter administration sought evolutionary change, "avoiding situations that could lead to explosions."<sup>416</sup>

The Carter administration gambled that Edward Gierek would resist the entreaties of his hardliners and of Moscow and that he would allow the dissident movement a measure of latitude. The gamble paid off. Although there were certainly instances of repression, detention, and even murder, the Polish government took a far lighter hand at moderating

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<sup>415</sup> Interview with Richard Townsend Davies, *Frontline Diplomacy*.

<sup>416</sup> 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. 19.

opposition than it easily could have. It was in this way that the human rights policy (and US-Polish policy more widely) effected change in Poland. The bombast of the human rights offensive was never really aimed at Poland, but at Moscow. Through economic measures and through the high-profile presidential visit to Poland, the Carter administration promoted the stability of a moderate client with the largest, most active political opposition in Eastern Europe. The United States kept alive that which the Soviets feared most. Tad Szulc in *Foreign Policy* quoted a senior Polish Catholic Church official as saying in late 1977 that “this was not the time to practice cheap anticommunism. National welfare was at stake.” By 1978, there were no political prisoners in the jails of Poland.<sup>417</sup>

According to Freedom House, “1977 was a year of progress, a year in which it was once again possible to regard democracy as the eventual goal of all peoples.”<sup>418</sup> US-Polish policy accomplished all its stated goals and charted a new, stronger course for US relations with the Warsaw Pact linchpin. It was an unqualified success for American interests. Trade with Eastern Europe, of which Poland was the largest trading partner, created a \$200 million dollar trade surplus for the United States in 1977.<sup>419</sup> Vest felt that the extended credits to Poland would “demonstrate to other countries in the region” the US desire to expand long-term relationships with compliant regimes.<sup>420</sup> The Soviet Union was put on the defensive and challenged ideologically in a place where it was difficult for it to employ an effective response.

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<sup>417</sup> Tad Szulc, “Living With Dissent,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 31 (Summer 1978), pg. 189.

<sup>418</sup> Raymond D. Gastil, *Freedom in the World: Political Rights and Civil Liberties, 1978*, (New York: Freedom House, 1978), pg. 30.

<sup>419</sup> House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *U.S. Policy Toward Eastern Europe*, Hearing, September 7 and 12, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1978, pg. 27.

<sup>420</sup> House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *Review of Recent Developments in Europe, 1978*, Hearing, January 31, 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1978, pg. 144.

Ultimately, Gierek paid the price for his policies, losing the confidence of Moscow. He was removed in 1980 as the Solidarity juggernaut gathered momentum. But as J.F. Brown has noted, “prerevolutionary situations” are recognized more by historians than by contemporaries.<sup>421</sup> Carter’s Polish policy is a case study in the possibility of marrying idealism to national interest. It is a lesson that these worlds do not have to be mutually exclusive. There have always been and likely always will be dissidents and movements in countries under leaders and systems which the United States does not support – this tension is seen most recently and dramatically with the Arab Spring movement. It is not enough for US officials to wring their hands and state “it is not our place to act.” Neither is it desirable to impose a US imprint onto an indigenous social movement. A subtle balance between US ideals and national interest must be sought. The Carter administration’s policy toward Poland in 1977 provides a model.

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<sup>421</sup> J.F. Brown, *Eastern Europe and Communist Rule*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), pg. 183.

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