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Détente and human rights: American and West European perspectives on international change

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Observers of international relations frequently assume that human rights challenge realpolitik. *This article shows that in the context of negotiations about European security in the early 1970s, the two went hand-in-hand. Despite significant transatlantic differences, Americans and Europeans conceptualized human rights as products of the Cold War, and principles for assuming more order and stability in the international system. Human rights discussions and agreements were not designed to end the Cold War in the 1970s. This analysis challenges assumptions about the absence of human rights in détente, and the alleged connection between the Helsinki Final Act and the Revolutions of 1989. The anti-Cold War quality of human rights activism in the 1980s was not present a decade earlier.*

'I have always been a proponent of democratization. But, you cannot build democracy in a matter of years. It takes decades and centuries ... We must let history take its course.

Henry Kissinger[1]

Most analysts of the international system today believe in human rights. The term and its various derivations – 'human security', 'human interests', and 'human welfare' – are ubiquitous. Concern for human rights is generally contrasted with a realpolitik that allegedly values the interests of the state above the individual. For some, this creates a simple dichotomy between a Kantian and a Hobbesian view of international

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behaviour. In terms of Cold War history, it elicits distinctions between what we might call the 'West European' and 'American' approaches to security in the era of détente, and their contemporary legacies.[2]

'West European' thinking, in these terms, represented an internationalization of social democracy. Emphasizing values of civility, cooperation, and individual dignity, policy-makers like West German Chancellor Willy Brandt and Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme separated themselves from established Cold War policies. According to this argument, they pursued new openings for human movement, trade, and mutual understanding with their adversaries, aimed at improving conditions across societies. This was, in Egon Bahr's famous phrase, 'change through rapprochement'. Brandt and Bahr's *Ostpolitik*, part of a broader West European approach in the 1970s, sought to match conciliatory policies with movement toward a consensus on basic values.[3]

The 'American' perspective on détente also emphasized rapprochement with adversaries, but it gave strong emphasis to the management rather than the encouragement of change. It placed a high premium on assuring stability and control among the most powerful states – especially the United States, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China – rather than legitimizing potentially destabilizing initiatives from allies, including West Germany. Fundamentally, American détente, as Henry Kissinger explained, was about superpower coexistence and controlled change:

> Our essential task is to recognize the need for a dual policy that simultaneously and with equal vigor resists expansionist drives and seeks to shape a more constructive relationship. We must prevent the Soviet Union from translating its growing strength into global or regional preponderance. But we must do so without escalating every crisis into a massive confrontation.[4]

The West European and American visions were not mutually exclusive. They differed primarily in their respective emphases on change and stability. The West European approach quite naturally focused on the role of the allies. The American perspective hinged on the largest, dominant Cold War actors. Most significant, the West European approach was multilateral, empowering many different states and negotiators. The American definition of détente remained primarily bilateral, trilateral if one included the People's Republic of China. Despite his frequent invocations of a multilateral world, Henry Kissinger practised one-to-one diplomacy. This is, of course, what his great trips to Moscow and Beijing in 1972 were all about.[5]

Examining détente in these dichotomous terms, however, should not blind us to a number of important transatlantic similarities. Both the West European and American conceptions emerged from a recognition that the security landscape changed in the 1960s. The emergence of near US–Soviet nuclear parity made conflict more dangerous and the imperatives for crisis-avoidance overriding. The distant prospects of transformation in the most contested Cold War zones, particularly Berlin, motivated leaders to embrace a tacit settlement on the European geopolitical status quo.[6] Leaders in Western Europe and the United States, encouraged by their citizens, sought new measures for assuring peace and new initiatives for improving international conditions. This perspective ultimately made détente workable.[7]

Human rights were part of both West European and American approaches to détente. Willy Brandt, Henry Kissinger, and their counterparts, saw a strong connection between peaceful international relations and improved human relations. They believed that geopolitical stability and cooperation must precede values changes within societies, and they argued for the strong, and sometimes secretive, role of state leaders. Through summits and treaty negotiations they would build the political structures necessary for the furtherance of human rights.[8]

Contrary to our contemporary rhetoric, human rights were (and continue to be) embedded in *Realpolitik*. For the practitioners of détente they were not negotiating tools or policy positions. They were principles that defined what leaders desired, their 'purposes' in a phrase Kissinger uses frequently in his writings. They did not have an independent existence, as philosophers posited, but grew out of the institutions and agreements between leaders in the international system. Talk of human rights in terms separated from the trade-offs and negotiations of Cold War diplomacy was, for Kissinger and others, empty rhetoric:

> [T]he question is not whether our values should affect our foreign policy, but how. The issue is whether we have the courage to face complexity and the inner conviction to deal with ambiguity, whether we will look behind easy slogans and recognize that our great goals can only be reached by patience and in imperfect stages.[9]

Human rights were not alternatives to the Cold War. They were, in fact, products of the Cold War. The strategic and political landscape after the early 1960s gave new attention to human rights as policy-makers sought stability and cooperation across East–West divides. Détente, in both its West European and American formulations, did not seek to end the Cold War, but to make it easier to live with. In the eyes of policy-makers and most observers, human rights would improve the *existing* system of international relations. They were a part of the more stable and cooperative Cold War institutions that leaders wanted to build.[10]

The differences between West European and American conceptions of détente centred on tactics. How would one implement and enforce individual protections? How long a time horizon would one create for substantive political change in the treatment of citizens? Which institutions would play the role of human rights monitors?

My colleagues Thomas Schwartz and Jussi Hanhimäki have written ground-breaking works that point to both the conservative and revolutionary elements of détente.[11] I agree with them in their focus on the cautious, even fearful, impulses behind policy-making during the period. I also agree with their analysis of the transformative effects this period had on great power diplomacy and politics on the ground, particularly in Eastern Europe. My point in this essay is to connect their sophisticated discussion with a more detailed analysis of the diplomacy surrounding human rights at the time. Negotiations about human rights, like détente as a whole, involved an uneasy combination of conservative and revolutionary motives on both sides of the Atlantic.

Re-examining the Helsinki Final Act

Since the end of the Cold War, numerous scholars have looked to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 as markers of transatlantic divergence on human rights. The West Europeans, after all, pushed for the inclusion of a 'Basket III' provision on human rights that the United States and the Soviet Union initially opposed. Similarly, scholars have pointed to the human rights provisions in the Helsinki Final Act as a challenge to the Cold War – a legitimization for dissident voices in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union that would ultimately bring down communism. According to this latter argument, West European emphases on 'change through reconciliation' elicited the end of the Cold War. America's bilateral policies forestalled change.[12]

The transatlantic discussions leading to the Helsinki Final Act displayed the growing gap between West European and American conceptions of détente from the early 1960s through the late 1970s. These discussions also underlined consistent transatlantic agreement on the near-term permanence of the Cold War and the role of human rights as forces for order and stability, not disorder and rapid change. West European policy-makers believed their emphasis on human values would strengthen the integration of the anti-communist states and their ability to negotiate constructively with their counterparts in the East. The continued East–West division was, in fact, assumed.

American détente policy began with a recognition of Europe's continued division. The Nixon administration ultimately embraced West European calls for a human rights 'basket' in the Helsinki Final Act because this provision served to solidify the geopolitical status quo. Agreements on travel and trade would make borders more peaceful and permanent. None of the negotiators, Henry Kissinger frankly admits, expected that the human rights provisions would play a powerful role in undermining the basic Cold War markers of authority.[13]

The uses of the human rights provisions in the Helsinki Final Act to empower dissidents and discredit communist regimes (especially in the 1980s) did not reflect the intentions of the Act's West European, American, or Soviet authors. Courageous men and women – including Andrei Sakharov, Vaclav Havel, and Lech Walesa – re-defined human rights in anti-communist and anti-Cold War terms. They also received support from a new group of politicians – particularly US President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher – who shared their discomfort with the status quo qualities of détente. The strongest supporters of détente, especially Henry Kissinger and Willy Brandt, largely opposed these 'dangerous' developments in the 1980s. The turn in human rights rhetoric against the Cold War was also a turn against détente.[14]

In a post-Cold War world the 1975 treaty looks prescient, but it had a powerful status quo quality at the time. In fact, many public commentators and mainstream newspapers that strongly advocated human rights also criticized the Helsinki Final Act in exactly these terms.[15] Dissidents and politicians in the 1980s radicalized what was an essentially conservative document. An examination of transatlantic debates about the changing

security landscape, and their application to the CSCE, illustrates the close connection between human rights and concern for international order in the era of détente.

The American reconceptualization of European security after 1962

The conclusion of the Berlin Crisis in 1962 and the common recognition that the geopolitical division of Europe was too dangerous to alter led the American foreign policy community, including Henry Kissinger, to reconceptualize European security. Instead of emphasizing the mobilization of resources and public opinion for conflict with the Soviet bloc, the US government began to place a new premium on proposals for diplomatic cooperation around potential flash points. Soviet–American discussions of a 'non-aggression' pact, in conjunction with the negotiations for a limited test ban treaty, were a primary example of this urge to create a diplomatic process for the management of dangers. What Marc Trachtenberg calls a 'constructed peace' in Europe was a new commitment to cooperative management of disputes by the dominant states.[16]

Soviet–American security discussions after 1962 involved an unprecedented degree of mutual interest, but they remained fundamentally focused on military issues. They also involved a re-definition of security in limited national terms. This is a point that scholars have largely neglected. To escape broader East–West Cold War antagonisms, policy-makers in Washington and Moscow emphasized the importance of addressing specific security problems on a case-by-case basis – for example, the division of Berlin, above-ground nuclear testing, and nuclear arms control. Policy-makers avoided broader ideological and geopolitical differences by focusing on nationally and regionally-centred topics. This was also true for the initiatives of West European governments, most significantly the policies of *Ostpolitik* pursued by the Federal Republic. Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr argued for new German-centred overtures to the Soviet Union and East European states, while also affirming their strong anti-communist credentials.[17]

As a scholar and consultant to the administrations of John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, Henry Kissinger shared this newfound American emphasis upon building cooperation, within the West and across the East–West divide, around specific points of shared interest. Discussions of broad alliance architecture and 'grand designs' for peace in Europe only exacerbated philosophical and historical differences, according to Kissinger. Instead, he argued for a focus on specific areas of agreement in building a more stable Atlantic and European-wide community. Addressing the disarray and acrimony in NATO, sparked in part by French President Charles de Gaulle's assertiveness, Kissinger embraced a narrow and nation-centred framework for security deliberations:

> I feel that a way to promote Atlantic unity under present circumstances is to declare a moratorium for a while on strategic questions, such as who presses the button in the inconceivable circumstance of general nuclear war, and instead to try to develop mechanisms by which common foreign policies can be conducted in the more

frequent circumstances of day-to-day diplomacy, East–West relations, and disarmament negotiations.[18]

Like the Johnson administration, Kissinger emphasized the role of the largest states – the United States, West Germany, France, and Great Britain – in guiding discussions of common West European problems. He embraced the strong trend toward European integration and the renewed emphasis on the common values of 'Western civilization', but not through a superstructure of new institutions and bureaucracies. For Kissinger, the nations in a more integrated Europe should re-examine their security and values through state-to-state consultations, led by the dominant powers. This was a redefinition of security along great power lines, with little room for the influence of small states. Kissinger sounded very much like de Gaulle on this point:

> In 1958 it was proposed [by de Gaulle] that a three-nation executive committee be established to coordinate the work of the Atlantic Alliance. That membership would be too limited, but it does seem to me that some kind of steering group for the Atlantic Alliance, one that is trying to look ahead over five or ten years to discern the kind of future to be built politically, and particularly that tries to develop common policies in East–West relations and on the issue of disarmament, would go a long way toward taking some of the sting out of the purely military debates which, in my judgment, are insoluble.[19]

Kissinger repeated his counsel for a modest, great power dominated redefinition of European security throughout the second half of the 1960s. This logic underpinned his emphasis on two primary European security issues when he took office as President Richard Nixon's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs: nuclear arms control (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks – SALT) and mutual balanced force reductions (MBFR). Both issues promised security benefits to the largest European states by diminishing military threats and creating new confidence-building measures through transparency and consultation. SALT and MBFR also helped to reduce the tensions between the United States and the largest European nations over questions of burden-sharing for military costs. Limited armaments would allow for more limited costs, especially at a time when the United States found itself militarily over-stretched in Southeast Asia.[20]

From their earliest meetings with the Soviet Ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, Nixon and Kissinger emphasized SALT and MBFR as areas of mutually beneficial agreement that would serve the interests of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Although the White House attempted to use arms control discussions for leverage over Moscow's policies in Vietnam and the Middle East, Nixon clearly indicated that: 'It was not his view that the initiation of such [arms control] talks must be conditioned on the settlement of larger political issues.' Broader strategic deliberations would occur in parallel with arms control negotiations, but one would not be dependent on the other. Basic issues of European military security would receive independent and consistent attention, laying the groundwork for attention to political questions, including human rights.[21]

Nixon's words closely followed Kissinger's advice to the president that, especially regarding European security, 'progress depends on specific settlements, not personal

diplomacy'.[22] Nowhere did the national security adviser contemplate a transfer of initiative in Europe from traditional policy elites. A new European order would be built on old sources of authority. In this context, the Nixon administration pursued a simple European security policy that emphasized close great power cooperation, bolstering the stabilizing weight and influence of the dominant states.

Kissinger's approach to European security was therefore a continuation of the essential framework implemented by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. He embraced European integration, but not in the cause of any transnational European institutional structure. Instead, Kissinger saw integration as a means of managing change on the European continent, improving communications with the United States, and building a common transatlantic political identity. He used closer internal European relations to further specific areas of common security interest among allies and across the East–West divide.

For all of his talk about a grand strategic vision, Kissinger avoided articulating a broad architecture for a future Europe. In the newly available documentation from the files of the National Security Council, the State Department, Kissinger's telephone transcripts, and President Nixon's White House tapes, the absence of a strategic vision for Europe is, in fact, striking. Meeting with his British counterpart, Michael Palliser, Kissinger anticipated this finding. He 'predicted that there would be no "Grand Designs" or attempts to foist ready made solutions on the Europeans'. Kissinger called for close alliance coordination, including possibly 'reviving the "directorate"' proposals of de Gaulle. He also invited more initiative from the major European states on specific security issues, especially coordinating non-American nuclear weapons deployments.[23]

Most significant, Kissinger accepted the fundamental realignment of the post-1962 geopolitical landscape: the recognition that European security hinged upon consultation and cooperation by leaders across the East–West divide. It was not East–West treaties that mattered to Kissinger *per se*, but what they represented for a commitment to stability and the management of differences on the European continent. This is a point Kissinger emphasized in his conversations with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin. On 28 July 1970, more than a year-and-a-half into Nixon's first term, the national security adviser explained: 'We have never really had any discussions on European matters, you and I, and it would be useful to clarify some of that. The President has asked me to let you know of our constructive spirit.'[24] This 'constructive spirit', and its application to the specific problems of nuclear and conventional arms control, was the central tenet of Kissinger's approach to European security. It reflected the collective thinking of American policy-makers since 1962.

Human rights and common values had a place in this American scheme for European security. They were the foundation for alliance and the purposes a peaceful international system would serve. They were not, however, the starting point for discussions of security. Kissinger, Nixon, and others looked to human rights as consequences of international cooperation. Détente would protect these values by creating a hospitable environment in Europe where they could thrive.

The agreement on basic principles

Kissinger's determination to build a 'constructive spirit' for European security was embodied in the Agreement on Basic Principles – officially 'The Basic Principles of Relations Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics'. President Nixon and Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev signed this document on 29 May 1972, at the conclusion of the first Soviet-American summit meeting in Moscow. The text began with a clear renunciation of prior hostilities and a commitment to 'peaceful coexistence' between the superpowers. The completion of SALT I, in conjunction with the Agreement on Basic Principles, indicated that Moscow and Washington would work on a case-by-case basis to regulate potential conflicts and avoid any 'dangerous exacerbation of their relations'.[25]

The American emphasis on assuring European security through great power cooperation was at the centre of this document and its purpose. The Agreement on Basic Principles would, Kissinger hoped, legitimize specific 'rules of conduct' between and within alliances that strengthened the managerial role of the dominant states – especially the United States and the Soviet Union.[26] In this context, the document announced that Washington and Moscow would 'widen the juridical basis of their mutual relations'. International conflicts had become more complex and multi-dimensional, the two sides acknowledged, but the superpowers asserted their dominant regional influence, particularly in Europe. They pledged to encourage bilateral and multilateral agreements among states that would assure stability rather than conflict between NATO and the Warsaw Pact.[27]

Kissinger had worked hard to get the Agreement on Basic Principles drafted and approved. It enshrined his vision of détente as an international framework for stability that promised security through great power cooperation on specific issues, especially in the military sphere. The Agreement on Basic Principles also connected Kissinger's efforts at securing stability in Europe with a higher moral purpose. This was, after all, a document about principles of peace – reducing the threat of war, in particular. In the document, Kissinger made the case that the work of dominant leaders to manage conflict protected the core values of Western civilization. Through a mix of restraint and collaboration, Nixon and Brezhnev would assure the sustenance of society during an 'age in which a cataclysm depends on the decisions of men'.[28] The Agreement on Basic Principles assured that the right men, with the right perspective, made the decisions.

As it concentrated management of European security in a small number of hands, the Agreement on Basic Principles excluded many potential influences on policy. The document was remarkably silent on the role of international organizations, like the United Nations and the European Community, in contributing to continental security. The text presumed that questions of security and the locus of decision-making fit within traditional demarcations of state sovereignty. It also presumed a steep hierarchy among sovereign states, with the United States and the Soviet Union at the top, Great Britain and France a step down, and small states like Belgium near the bottom. Power and authority, according to the Basic Principles of 1972, were concentrated at the top

of the sovereign state hierarchy. This framework largely excluded small states, cross-cultural ideas, and transnational actors from deliberations on European security. Endeavouring to make the progress in US–Soviet relations 'irreversible', Kissinger used the Agreement on Basic Principles to build what he called a more 'constructive personal relationship' with leaders in Moscow. On the eve of the final negotiations for the CSCE, Kissinger renounced the interference of small states and domestic actors in the security deliberations of the great powers.[29]

The transformation of security doctrine in Western Europe, 1969–75

Kissinger's frustration with the resistance to his policies in Europe reflected much more than allied intransigence. A large number of West European governments had, by the late 1960s, reconceptualized security in terms that departed significantly from America's evolving thinking at the time. To his chagrin, Kissinger recognized this phenomenon as well as anyone. In an off-the-record telephone conversation with journalist Jerrold Schecter he explained that the West European states 'are now all facing really the legacy of World War II in the sense [that] they are just getting back to conducting their own foreign policy'.

> The problem of the western countries right now is that the nature of authority in all of them is in the process of redefinition. The nature of their national purposes is in redefinition because all of them are going through domestic crises, including we [*sic*]. That on top of that to relate to other countries becomes a much more complex task.[30]

With the notable exception of France, the West European countries had generally followed the American lead on security policy during the first two decades of the Cold War. West European integration, initially supported by Washington, had furthered this trend. By the late 1960s – in the context of the stalemate around Berlin, superpower détente, and growing domestic restiveness – West European assent to American security leadership was no longer axiomatic. Kissinger's criticisms of earlier American administrations had anticipated this outcome, but not in the form that it took.

For all of the difficulties posed by the French, and Foreign Minister Michel Jobert in particular, the small West European allies proved most effective at transforming the European security agenda and undercutting American leadership. Just as Belgian influence contributed to the formulation of the Harmel Report and the new NATO focus on East–West cooperation, Belgian influences in European Community meetings moved the body of West European security doctrine in a new direction. At the suggestion of Étienne Davignon, the political director of the Belgian foreign ministry, in 1969 representatives from France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Belgium (the European 'Six') formed a high-ranking committee to author an agenda for a coordinated foreign policy. The creation of the committee was a direct reaction to Soviet pressures for a European security conference, disenchantment with the stagnant policies pursued by the United States in Europe since the early 1960s, and internal desires for new initiatives within each of the

participating states. The nature of this committee, and the exclusion of both the United States and Great Britain, indicated that West European governments were prepared to contemplate a joint and independent foreign policy. This was unprecedented in the Cold War world.[31]

The 'Davignon Report', issued on 23 October 1970, made the formulation of a 'European' foreign policy the cornerstone of a nascent European polity: 'Europe must prepare itself to carry out the responsibilities which, because of its greater cohesion and its growing role, it has the duty and necessity to assume in the world.' The leaders of the Six pledged to work together in building a foreign policy for Europe that 'corresponds to its tradition and its mission'. This mission included a furthering of détente across the continent and a redoubled emphasis on civilizational values: 'United Europe must be founded on a common patrimony of respect for liberty and human rights.'[32]

Kissinger dismissed language like this as empty rhetoric, but here he misjudged how the Europe of the 1970s differed from the Europe of the 1950s and 1960s.[33] The European Six immediately accepted the Davignon Report, initiating consultative meetings among their foreign ministers four times each year. They intended to integrate human rights explicitly into their collective policy-making. Lower level foreign ministry officials from each country met monthly to follow developments and formulate common policies. New informal coordinating mechanisms also took shape at the ambassadorial level, particularly for West European representatives working with non-European interlocutors. Implementation of the Davignon Report reinforced a growing sense that a common European foreign policy was emerging, and it provided the rudimentary institutional structure for it to become a reality.[34]

Human rights concerns, defined as an integral part of Europe's 'tradition and its mission', became the linchpin for assembling a 'European' foreign policy. Freer movement of peoples, protections for basic human dignities, and social justice – these were issues that citizens throughout Europe prioritized. This was, of course, particularly true in West Germany, where citizens suffered permanent separation from relatives imprisoned in East Germany and other Eastern bloc states. The Davignon Report provided a basis for making German *Ostpolitik* – particularly proposed initiatives for reuniting divided families – a European-wide policy, with a priority the United States would never give to the issue. The existence of a European-wide policy on *Ostpolitik* legitimized its aims in terms of higher values, rather than nation-centred concerns. It also helped to insulate the policy from attacks by opponents, including some in the United States who saw it as an inopportune break from anti-communist containment.[35]

Emphasis on human rights assured influence for the smaller states – particularly Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg – that felt excluded from the great power deliberations at the centre of Kissinger's conception of détente. A West European policy mechanism, Étienne Davignon and others recognized, would give these smaller states more opportunities to shape policy. In this context, Davignon exerted an agenda-setting role in defining values that would reallocate power multilaterally,

giving European nations new voice in international policy. This emphasis on values became fundamental to West European conceptions of security, so much so that three decades later some observers would criticize the continent's leaders for forsaking force in the name of a clear conscience.[36]

Criticism of this kind is, of course, unfair. Human rights served the concrete interests of European states seeking a wider world role. They reflected a fundamental judgement, encouraged by discontented citizens, that European security required more than stable borders and deterred armies. This is where the momentum toward European integration mattered. Following the initiatives for economic integration begun in the 1950s, the leaders of the Six made a commitment in the early 1970s to craft a separate and more humane identity for their continent, amidst the Cold War polarization of East and West. Men like Willy Brandt, Georges Pompidou, and Étienne Davignon considered themselves firm American allies – even 'Cold Warriors' – but they also pursued a long-range vision of security that returned to an inherited ideal of peaceful integration across the continent. Human rights made integration possible and they promised, at least in theory, to eliminate many sources of conflict over ideologies and disputed territories. The transformation of West European security doctrine in the wake of the Davignon Report emphasized building a common society in pursuit of common security.[37]

The CSCE, détente, and human rights

The consultations among foreign ministers initiated by the Davignon Report underpinned the West European position at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Responding to Soviet pressure for a continent-wide initiative, the West European states now had the institutional basis for adopting a unified position. They effectively insisted on American participation, despite initial Soviet bloc objections, and they used their clout to push for NATO endorsement of the security discussions. In May 1970 NATO's Rome Communiqué went so far as to declare that:

> Allied Governments would continue and intensify their contacts, discussions or negotiations through all appropriate channels, bilateral or multilateral, and that they remained receptive to signs of willingness on the part of the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries to engage in such discussions. Progress, they said, in these discussions and negotiations would help to ensure the success of any eventual conference, in which of course, the North American members of the Alliance would participate, to discuss and negotiate substantial problems of cooperation and security in Europe.[38]

The Rome Communiqué included *Ostpolitik*, nuclear arms control, mutual balanced force reductions, and common principles in its definition of continental security discussions. They were all part of a single package. Following the lead of the six states engaged in the Davignon process, especially Belgium, NATO embraced 'the development of international relations with a view to contributing to the freer

movement of people, ideas, and information, and to developing cooperation in the cultural, economic, technical, and scientific fields as well as in the field of human environment'. A successful European-wide security conference would require progress on all of these issues, with agreement on principles serving as a cornerstone for true 'multilateral negotiations'.[39]

The European Six used their collective clout to set the agenda for the CSCE. They established a firm and clear position that responded effectively to initial Soviet overtures. They used their combined leverage to push for NATO endorsement of their approach, extending the alliance's call for East–West détente beyond the outlines of the 1967 Harmel Report. Most significant, they included the United States in their collective deliberations, but as a junior partner following the West European lead. Kissinger admits to this in his memoirs, when he recounts that 'the American strategy was to create no obstacles to progress but to do little to accelerate it either'.[40] In August 1972 he was even more explicit in a telephone conversation with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, when he explained that the CSCE was primarily an initiative that the US addressed through 'imagery' rather than the detailed substance involved with the MBFR negotiations. 'We are in no insane hurry' about the CSCE, Kissinger facetiously told Dobrynin.[41]

The West Europeans were much more optimistic than Kissinger about explicitly linking human rights and security negotiations. The coordinated position of the European Six allowed them to adopt a leadership role within transatlantic deliberations. Washington did not only cede momentum to the West Europeans, as Kissinger claimed. The West Europeans seized the initiative, making the CSCE and agreement on European-wide principles the central issue in transatlantic consultations. This was, adopting Kissinger's term, reverse linkage, with the West Europeans holding American initiatives for improved East–West relations hostage to progress on a continent-wide security architecture that included provisions for human rights. Human rights could not wait for international peace; they had to find joint expression in an international treaty.

Kissinger's profound frustration with his West European counterparts reflected their success in forcing the United States to modify its security agenda on their terms. In March 1974 Kissinger pledged to 'kill the Davignon Committee', but it only increased in influence and effectiveness during the following months.[42] A year later he lamented that, despite his own support for a more active allied role in foreign affairs, 'the single worst mistake of the post-war period was to encourage European unity'.[43]

By the middle of the 1970s the West Europeans had effectively formulated and pushed a reconceptualization of policy that linked security and human rights more explicitly than either Kissinger or his Soviet counterparts proposed. The use of principle to assert a multilateral negotiating structure challenged the continued predominance of the superpowers in Cold War deliberations. It undermined the authority of figures like Kissinger, strengthening the power of the European states in the diplomatic process. Somewhat shocked, Kissinger warned of the chaos that

would follow: 'I think we are heading into a third republic state. We are going to become ungovernable.'[44]

Kissinger had been at the centre of transatlantic discussions about security since the middle of the 1950s. He was a mainstay of the Bilderberg group, the Pugwash movement, and other forums created for a frank exchange of views among leading foreign policy figures in Europe and North America. He had also used his position as the executive director of the famous International Seminar at Harvard University and his standing as a fellow at Harvard's newly created Center for International Affairs to forge strong personal connections with many of the major foreign policy thinkers in Europe. This cosmopolitan transatlantic milieu was the source of Kissinger's criticisms of American policy and his commitment to a new security vision in the late 1960s.[45]

It also, however, encouraged a rigid isolation from the emerging pressures and ideas about security that did not conform to the elite and American-led models of Bilderberg and the International Seminar. When, through the Davignon Report and other venues, challenges to Kissinger's transatlantic milieu emerged, he was unprepared to deal with them. Kissinger's intimacy with what had long been standard modes of allied interaction led him to lash out at 'these fucking Europeans' who acted with a newfound spirit of independence.[46]

To Kissinger's credit, by the summer of 1974 he recognized that the multilateral and principled West European approach to security had some merits. It could, in fact, strengthen stability and help to 'normalize' the Cold War. At the very least, it attracted the kind of popular support that Kissinger's alternative vision of great power détente lacked. The West European emphasis on human rights addressed mounting criticisms from both the political left and the political right: 'the very people who were accusing us of being warmongers, insensitive, immoral, and five thousand other things, now think we are not tough enough on the Russians'.[47]

The provisions for peaceful border changes and human rights protection in the CSCE negotiations provided Kissinger with grounds for arguing that he was forging more cooperative East–West relations, while also pushing for positive change within communist regimes. He could now claim to pursue human rights on a shorter time frame than he really thought practical. Kissinger spoke in these terms during a private telephone conversation with one of the leading American political conservatives, William F. Buckley, Jr.:

> A lot of conservatives are screaming that the Security Conference is sanctifying the Soviet presence in Europe. The Conference wasn't our idea. It isn't something I am proud of. Our instructions to our men were to stay $\frac{1}{2}$ a step behind the Europeans. Insofar as anything of substance in the conference is concerned, it should be looked at as a provision for peaceful change. The territorial integrity issue is something they have gone over for years. The French, British and Germans had already made their bilateral agreements. It is more in the direction of change than sanctification.[48]

Speaking with Senator Frank Church, on the opposite side of the political spectrum, Kissinger made the same case. He accused 'liberal intellectuals' of adopting rigid

positions on the East–West conflict. From the perspective of citizens living under Soviet domination in Eastern Europe, Kissinger contended, 'there is no doubt that the feelings there are in the direction of liberalization and easing of their trying to shake off Russian domination to some extent'.[49]

Kissinger certainly did not foresee the role that the CSCE would play in empowering dissent within the Soviet bloc and transforming norms about international relations.[50] He did, however, recognize that the post-1962 American reconceptualization of European security, which he had partially authored, required a place for human rights. He had always believed this, but in the short term had prioritized stability and conflict management above principle. Following the lead of the smaller West European states, Kissinger gave human rights more prominence in the CSCE negotiations.

Ideals and principles remained, however, closely tied to military and political calculations. The Helsinki Final Act of 1975 made geopolitical stability in Europe a necessary accompaniment of human rights. The treaty declared the 'universal significance of human rights' and it protected the right of each state to 'to choose and develop its political, social, economic and cultural systems as well as its right to determine its laws and regulations'. It claimed to speak for the diverse 'peoples' of Europe, but it was an agreement filled with arcane diplomatic language, unrepresentative of voices outside the traditional channels of Cold War diplomacy. In some places the Helsinki Final Act was self-contradictory in its linking of security and principle. It argued for frontier revisions 'by peaceful means' and it affirmed the 'inviolability of frontiers' at the same time.[51] In all of these ways, the treaty reflected the deep, contested, and often uncertain intermingling of realpolitik and human rights in the era of détente.

Conclusions

This analysis should stand as a warning against teleological perspectives that draw a straight line of causality from human rights and the Helsinki Final Act to the revolutions of 1989 in Europe and the end of the Cold War. It is also a warning against dismissals of Henry Kissinger, and American foreign policy during the Nixon administration, as an ineffective and destructive force in Europe.[52] Quite the contrary, the evolution of American and West European policies reflected an extended series of debates on both sides of the Atlantic about what security should mean in a world of nuclear stalemate, domestic upheaval, détente, and increasing West European integration. Human rights were part of this discussion, not an alternative to it. Kissinger was only one of many figures who exerted important influence on the emerging shape of European security. His positions changed in light of international and domestic pressures, but they remained firmly within a Cold War framework that assumed the permanent, orderly division of the continent.[53]

The Helsinki Final Act, and détente in general, offered little resolution to long-standing debates about the appropriate weighing of security and human rights. Policy-makers on both sides of the Atlantic might have proven too attached to Cold War thinking in the 1970s. They were not, however, wrong in recognizing the very real

limits of human rights rhetoric, and the need to combine aspirations with practical policy instruments. Henry Kissinger was no doubt correct when he admitted that even the most powerful actors must often make difficult compromises, and then 'let history take its course'. In the case of European security after 1962, this was both a conservative and a revolutionary story – one, thankfully, with a happy ending.

Notes

[1] Author's interview with Henry Kissinger, 26 October 2005.

[2] For the strongest and most influential statement of this position, see Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power*. See also Kupchan, *The End of the American Era*; Reid, *The United States of Europe*.

[3] Vortrag des Leiters des Presse- und Informationsamtes des Landes Berlin, Egon Bahr, 15. Juli 1963, in *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik*, 9 (Frankfurt am Main: Alfred Metzner Verlag, 1967–87), 573; Bender, *Neue Ostpolitik*; Risse-Kappen, 'Ideas Do Not Float Freely', 195–202.

[4] Henry Kissinger, 'The Permanent Challenge of Peace: U.S. Policy Toward the Soviet Union', speech delivered in San Francisco, California, 3 February 1976, reprinted in the *Department of State Bulletin* 74 (23 February 1976), 204.

[5] On this point, see Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, 260–90; Suri, *Power and Protest*, 226–58.

[6] See Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 379–402; Gaddis, *The Long Peace*, 215–45.

[7] See Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*, esp. 138–248; Suri, *Power and Protest*, 7–43. Thomas Schwartz persuasively argues that President Lyndon Johnson deeply and consistently pursued a policy of détente in Europe. Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe.*

[8] On the connection between power politics and the humane treatment of citizens for Kissinger, see Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*, 16–51.

[9] Henry Kissinger, 'The Moral Foundations of Foreign Policy', speech delivered in Bloomington, Minnesota, 15 July 1975, reprinted in the *Department of State Bulletin* 73 (4 August 1975), 167.

[10] See Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*, 197–248.

[11] In addition to their contributions to this forum, see Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe*; Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect.*

[12] See Wenger *et al.*, *Origins of the European Security System*; Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*; Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces*; English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*. I made a similar criticism of American détente policies in *Power and Protest*, 260–63.

[13] Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 757.

[14] This is a crucial point often missed in the literature on human rights. Writers presume continuity in the essential conceptualization of human rights after 1975. They also refuse to give Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher credit for supporting human rights in important ways. Two exceptions to this scholarly blindspot are Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 195–236; Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 338–450.

[15] See Morgan, 'North America, Atlanticism, and the Helsinki Process'.

[16] Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 379–402; Wenger and Suri, 'At the Crossroads of Diplomatic and Social History', 1–42. Vojtech Mastny shows that the reconceptualization of security in 1963 did not extend into a serious acceptance of détente between the United States and the Soviet Union. See Mastny, 'The 1963 Nuclear Test Ban', 3–25.

[17] For a clear description of *Ostpolitik* in these terms, see Egon Bahr, draft article for *Christ und Welt*, February 1965, Box 9B, Egon Bahrs Nachlaß, Archiv der sozialen Demokratie, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn. See also Suri, *Power and Protest*, 216–26.

[18] Kissinger, 'NATO: Evolution or Decline', 118.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Kissinger raises many of these issues, in particular the controversy over alliance burden-sharing, in his memoirs. See Kissinger, *White House Years*, 81–86, 147–150. Nixon and Kissinger also faced strong US domestic pressure for a reduction in American military deployments on the European continent. The Mansfield Amendment, proposed by Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield to enforce a fifty percent cut on American deployments through congressional legislation, brought these domestic pressures to a head in May 1971. See Oberdorfer, *Senator Mansfield*, 387–91.

[21] Memorandum of Conversation between Anatoly Dobrynin, Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and Malcolm Toon (Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs), White House, 17 February 1969, Folder: USSR, Memcons Dobrynin/President, 17 February 1969, Box 340, NSC File, Richard Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives, College Park, Maryland [hereafter Nixon Papers].

[22] Henry Kissinger to Richard Nixon, 15 February 1969, Folder: USSR, Memcons Dobrynin/President, 17 February 1969, Box 340, NSC File, Nixon Papers.

[23] Notes from Conversation between Michael Palliser and Henry Kissinger, 19 December 1968, PREM 13/2097, Public Records Office, Kew, London [hereafter PRO]. Kissinger returned to his long-standing belief that the major European states should develop a larger and more effective independent nuclear force. Most of the American documents on this topic remain classified. See the extensive British documentation on this subject, PREM 15/1357, PRO.

[24] Transcript of Henry Kissinger's telephone conversation with Anatoly Dobrynin 28 July 1970, Henry A. Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, Nixon Papers [hereafter HAK telcons].

[25] 'Basic Principles of Relations Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics', 29 May 1972, reprinted in *The U.S. Department of State of Bulletin* 66 (26 June 1972), 898–99.

[26] Henry Kissinger, News Conference, Kiev, 29 May 1972, reprinted in *The U.S. Department of State of Bulletin* 66 (26 June 1972), 890–97, quotations on 892, 894.

[27] 'Basic Principles of Relations Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics', 29 May 1972.

[28] Henry Kissinger, News Conference, Kiev, 29 May 1972, reprinted in *The U.S. Department of State of Bulletin* 66 (26 June 1972), 890–97.

[29] Memorandum of Conversation between Leonid Brezhnev, Anatoly Dobrynin, Henry Kissinger *et al.*, Moscow, 24 October 1974, 11:00am–2:00pm; Memorandum of Conversation between Leonid Brezhnev, Anatoly Dobrynin, Henry Kissinger *et al.*, Moscow, 26 October 1974, 7:10pm–10:20pm, Folder: 11/74, Japan, Korea, USSR, Box A6, Kissinger-Scowcroft Files, Gerald Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan. These two documents are also reprinted in Burr, ed., *The Kissinger Transcripts*, 327–55. On this general point, see also Maresca, *To Helsinki*, 8–12.

[30] Transcript of Henry Kissinger's telephone conversation with Jerrold Schecter 22 March 1974, HAK telcons.

[31] See Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, 39–42; Dinan, *Encyclopedia of the European Union*, 117.

[32] La rapport de Luxembourg (rapport Davignon), available at http://www.ellopos.net/politics/davignon.htm (accessed 8 July 2005). With one exception, I have used the English translation of the Davignon Report found in de Giustino, *A Reader in European Integration*, 196–199. The text of the Davignon Report in de Giustino's volume translates 'les droits de l'homme' literally as 'the rights of man'. I have translated this phrase as the more recognized and accurate English term, 'human rights'.

[33] See, for one of many examples, the transcript of Henry Kissinger's telephone conversation with Walter Stoessel 19 November 1973, HAK telcons.

[34] See Urwin, *The Community of Europe*, 147–9.

[35] See Dinan, *Ever Closer Union*, 63–4.

[36] See Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power*.

[37] For the seminal European work on the nature of international society, see Bull, *The Anarchical Society*; Bull and Watson, *The Expansion of International Society*.

[38] Final Communiqué from the North Atlantic Council Meeting in Rome, 26–27 May 1970, available at http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c700526a.htm (accessed 7 July 2005).

[39] Ibid.

[40] Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 640. See also Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 757–61; Morgan, 'North America, Atlanticism, and the Helsinki Process'.

[41] Transcript of Henry Kissinger's telephone conversation with Anatoly Dobrynin, 22 August 1972, HAK telcons.

[42] Transcript of Henry Kissinger's telephone conversation with Stephen Graubard, 18 March 1974, HAK telcons.

[43] Transcript of Henry Kissinger's telephone conversation with Joseph Sisco, 29 March 1975, HAK telcons.

[44] Transcript of Henry Kissinger's telephone conversation with Stephen Graubard, 18 March 1974, HAK telcons.

[45] See Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*, 92–137. On the Bilderberg group see Aubourg, 'Organizing Atlanticism', 92–105; Pomian, *Joseph Retinger*, 250–60; Gijswijt, 'An Atlantic Partnership?' On the Pugwash movement see Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces*.

[46] Transcript of Henry Kissinger's telephone conversation with Alexander Haig, 16 March 1974, HAK telcons. One should note that in this and other conversations Kissinger's criticisms of the Europeans are connected to a number of issues, including European security, the aftermath of the 1973 war in the Middle East, and personal relations.

[47] Transcript of Henry Kissinger's telephone conversation with Stephen Graubard, 18 March 1974, HAK telcons.

[48] Transcript of Henry Kissinger's telephone conversation with William F. Buckley, 21 July 1975, HAK telcons.

[49] Transcript of Henry Kissinger's telephone conversation with Senator Frank Church, 7 August 1975, HAK telcons.

[50] Kissinger admits to this in his memoirs. See Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 635–636. See also Maresca, *To Helsinki*, 64–9.

[51] All of these quotations come from the text of the Helsinki Final Act, see http://www.hri.org/docs/Helsinki75.html#H4.5 (accessed 12 July 2005).

[52] This is the position adopted most critically by Bundy, *A Tangled Web*, esp. 526–8.

[53] See Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*, esp. 52–91, 138–96.

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