

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES ON HISTORY AND GLOBALIZATION

# Globalizing Human Rights

Private Citizens, the Soviet  
Union, and the West

Christian Philip Peterson



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Union, and the West

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**To Cori Megan McCarthy and Baby Blue—the loves of my life**

# Abbreviations

Used in text:

AI	Amnesty International
AFTU	Association of Free Trade Unions of Workers
BEA	Bureau of European Affairs
CEC	Conference on East European Churches
CAPR	United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
CBM	Confidence-Building Measures
CDE	Conference on Security and Disarmament in Europe
CCECB	Council of Churches of the Evangelical Baptists
COCOM	Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls
CPSU	Soviet Communist Party
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
ES	Executive Secretariat
ESACR	United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
Exit Group	Initiative Committee to Fight for the Right of Free Exit from the USSR
HAIG	Helsinki Agreements Implementation Group
HRF	Human Rights Foundation
IHF	International Helsinki Federation
KGB	Committee of State Security
KOR	Committee of Workers Defense
ILO	International Labor Organization
KP	Klub Perestroika
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Soviet)
MFN	Most-Favored Nation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NSC	National Security Council
NSDD	National Security Decision Directive
NTS	People's Labor Alliance (France)

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PCG	Press Club Glasnost
PD	Presidential Directive
PRM	Presidential Review Memorandum
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty
SI	Socialist International
SMOT	Free Interprofessional Association of Workers
SOS	Scientists for Sakharov, Orlov, and Shcharansky
UCSJ	Union of Councils for Soviet Jews
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNCHR	United Nations Commission on Human Rights
UNCHRM	U.N. Human Rights Committee
USIA	United States Information Agency
USNAS	United States National Academy of Sciences
VOA	Voice of America
WCC	World Congress of Churches
WJC	World Jewish Congress
WPA	World Psychiatric Association

Used in footnotes and bibliography:

BBC	<i>BBC Summary of World Broadcasts</i>
BEA	Bureau of Ethnic Affairs
BM	Brzezinski Materials
CCL	<i>Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania</i>
CDSP	<i>Current Digest of the Soviet Press</i>
CCE	<i>Chronicle of Current Events</i>
CHRUR	<i>Chronicle of Human Rights in the USSR</i>
CO	Country
CV	Cyrus Vance
ES	Executive Secretariat
FO	Foreign Affairs
GSB	General Secretary Brezhnev
GSC	General Secretary Chernenko
GSG	General Secretary Gorbachev
HOSF	Head of State Files
HU	Human Rights
JC	Jimmy Carter
JCPL	Jimmy Carter Presidential Library
JT	Jessica Tuchman
Memcons	Memorandums of Conversations
MC	Midge Costanza
MH	Marilyn Haft
NA	National Archive

NSA	National Security Archive
NSABM	National Security Affairs—Brzezinski Materials
OPL	Office of Public Liaison
PPOP	<i>Public Papers of the President of the United States</i>
PH	Paul B. Henze
RCSCE	Records of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
RL	Robert L. Lipshutz Files
RRPL	Ronald Reagan Presidential Library
SB	<i>Samizdat Bulletin</i>
SAEA	Special Assistant for Ethnic Affairs
WHCF	White House Central Files
WO	William Odom
WHORM	White House Office of Records Management
USHCF	United States Helsinki Commission Files
ZB	Zbiginew Brzezinski

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# 1 Introduction

During the late 1960s and 1970s, the world watched as the United States, Soviet Union, and various European governments worked to reduce tensions and improve relations with each other by pursuing a policy known as détente. This process appeared to bear fruit when the United States, Canada, and thirty-three European nations, including the Soviet Union, signed the Final Act (Helsinki Accords) on 1 August 1975. Negotiated within a framework known as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), this agreement pledged signatories to respect the basic human rights and fundamental freedoms of private citizens, as well as promote the free flow of information, ideas, and people across national boundaries. It also called on each nation to recognize the legitimacy of existing borders in Europe save the possibility of “peaceful change” in the future. At the time, many in the United States saw this document as a victory for the USSR that sanctioned Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. The Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev lent credence to this view when he referred to the Final Act as “the culmination of everything positive that has been done thus far on our continent to bring about the change from the ‘cold war’ to détente and the genuine implementation of the principles of peaceful coexistence.”<sup>1</sup>

The U.S. President Gerald Ford and his subordinates recognized that many Americans viewed the signing of the Final Act and the pursuit of détente with the Soviet Union as little more than a shameful capitulation. Behind the scenes, they grappled with the question of how to justify signing this agreement and working to improve relations with the Soviet Union. On the eve of the signing ceremony, Secretary of State/National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger advised Ford to remember that “the CSCE results are not wholly what the Soviets wanted.” Far from being a U.S. defeat, Kissinger wrote, “*the philosophy which permeates most of the CSCE’s declarations is that of the West’s open societies* [Kissinger’s italics].” On paper, “the thrust implicit in this declarations is toward greater human rights, the freer movement of people and wider access to information.” After making this observation, Kissinger offered an important caveat. He told Ford that for all its potential strengths, any “final judgment” on the

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Final Act would depend on whether the Western world or Soviet Union did a better job of propagating "its version of the CSCE and . . . [the] future [of] European security."<sup>2</sup>

In retrospect, Kissinger's words appear quite prophetic. The signing of the Final Act helped bring about a global campaign that challenged Soviet human rights violations and raised fundamental questions about what constituted a legitimate U.S.-Soviet *détente*. Contrary to the wishes of Kissinger and Soviet policymakers, this struggle did not just involve debates between U.S. executive branch officials and Soviet policy makers. When transmitting credible information across borders, Soviet/Eastern European dissenters, Western private citizens, and members of the U.S. Congress exploited the language of the Helsinki Accords to forge a transnational network committed to globalizing the issue of Soviet human rights violations. The strength of this network played a fundamental role in making the subject of human rights an important aspect of Cold War competition until the USSR collapsed in 1991.

This work will explore the complexities of the role human rights played in U.S.-Soviet relations from the late 1960s to 1989. Unlike some treatments, it will not fall into the trap of addressing this topic through a narrow "state-centric" approach that privileges the behavior of top-level policymakers. Instead, the following pages will employ a transnational framework that examines the interactions among the U.S. executive branch, U.S. Congress, and Soviet government, as well as Western European leaders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private citizens. Employing such a framework does not mean that this study will make a sharp distinction between domestic and foreign affairs. The following pages will show how understanding the role human rights played in U.S.-Soviet relations "requires a global perspective that looks across national boundaries and within societies at the same time."<sup>3</sup> By following this approach, readers will see how domestic concerns about human rights violations often influenced Soviet and U.S. foreign policy; they will also come to appreciate how efforts to promote human rights abroad sometimes shaped U.S. and Soviet domestic policies.

Before exploring this development, we need to keep in mind that the term "dissent" has no simple definition.<sup>4</sup> In the case of the USSR, the term refers to a wide array of individuals such as democrats, *refuseniks* (Jews whose emigration requests had been denied), and nationalists in republics like Ukraine who expressed disapproval of the Soviet government's official policies in some sort of public fashion. In a broader sense, it can even refer to private citizens and government officials who engaged in non-sanctioned activities behind closed doors, such as discussing non-official poetry and debating Western European social-democratic ideas.<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this study, the term "dissenters" will refer to individuals in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe who called into question their governments' policies in some sort of public fashion or received punishment for participating in non-official activities.

## DEFINING DÉTENTE AND GLOBALIZING THE "HELSINKI PROCESS"

The best way to understand why the signing of the Final Act marked such an important moment in the Cold War involves seeing how the agreement reflected larger debates about what constituted the process of détente. This topic deserves attention because détente "was a complicated phenomenon" that involved far more than the easing of U.S.-Soviet or U.S.-Chinese tensions through face-to-face negotiations and arms control agreements. In practice, governments and private citizens advocated a mixture of policies aimed at promoting international stability, overcoming the Cold War divisions in Europe, and reducing military armaments.<sup>6</sup>

Because World War II ended without a comprehensive peace settlement, Soviet policymakers hoped to forge an agreement that legitimated the political status quo in Eastern Europe. To accomplish this goal, Moscow first proposed the convening of a general European security conference in February 1954. Besides inducing Western European governments to accept Moscow's domination of Eastern Europe, Soviet leaders hoped to prevent West Germany's "integration into" NATO and create "demilitarized" zones designed to remove U.S. military forces from Western Europe. They also wanted to forge agreements that allowed Moscow and its allies "to achieve much needed investment and technical assistance from the West."<sup>7</sup>

The United States and Western European governments showed little enthusiasm for the Soviet proposals calling for "demilitarized zones." While never a unified block, these governments countered with proposals that called for increased flows of information and travel of private citizens between Eastern and Western Europe. Western nations also asked for more scientific and cultural exchanges, as well as agreements that outlawed the jamming of foreign broadcasts. Fearing foreign subversion, the Soviet leaders had no intention of taking such far-reaching steps, which meant that the idea of convening a security conference became "overshadowed" by Cold War crises such as the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956.<sup>8</sup>

The prospects of a European security conference taking place improved during the 1960s as a result of the important changes that took place in U.S./Soviet relations and Cold War politics in Europe during the decade. After disputes over the status of Berlin and the Cuban missile crisis, the Soviet Union and United States took tentative steps toward forging a détente designed to ease Cold War tensions. Searching for more predictability and stability in their relationship, they signed a Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1963. With each side possessing the ability to obliterate the other in a nuclear exchange, Lyndon Johnson worked to forge agreements designed to reduce the risk of nuclear war and the level of conventional military armaments in Europe.<sup>9</sup>

The Nixon administration also worked to implement its own version of détente with the Soviet Union. In practice, Richard Nixon and his Secretary

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of State/National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger started from the assumption that the United States needed to find a new way of preventing the spread of communism across the globe and preserving international stability. Each of them recognized that the United States had become bogged down in an unpopular war in Vietnam and faced a wide variety of economic challenges at home. At the same time, Nixon and Kissinger also saw that the international environment had undergone fundamental changes since World War II. Not only had the international prestige and resources of the United States declined, but the emergence of competing centers of power in Western Europe, Japan, and China made the world much more multipolar than it had been during early days of the Cold War.<sup>10</sup>

Given the larger transformations in the international environment and the U.S. domestic scene mentioned above, Nixon and Kissinger adopted a *realpolitik* version of détente (Kissinger-style détente). This approach called for protecting U.S. interests by reducing global commitments and working with other nations depending on time and circumstances—including communist China—to create an international “structure of peace.” In the case of the Soviet Union, Nixon and Kissinger strove to make the Brezhnev regime a more responsible member of the international community. As a way of accomplishing this goal, they accepted the legitimacy of the USSR and vowed not to seek changes in the Soviet domestic order. They also worked to sign agreements designed to stabilize relations in areas such as arms control and trade. For this framework to work, they advocated using a mixture of either “positive inducements” or “negative sanctions” in response to the Soviet Union’s specific policies and behavior.<sup>11</sup>

At least in part, the Brezhnev regime’s decision to pursue a Kissinger-style détente with the United States grew out of a larger policy called “developed socialism.” This viewpoint started from the assumption that the USSR needed a stable domestic and international environment to further develop as a “mature” socialist society. Instead of carrying out democratic reforms or easing restrictions on individual freedoms, the Soviet government chose to ease Cold War tensions and improve domestic economic performance by expanding trade relations with Western Europe and the United States. Without taking steps that called into question the dominance of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU), Soviet leaders made “broad commercial exchange, technological transfer and financial borrowing” from the West an integral element of preserving “communist institutions” at home.<sup>12</sup>

The expansion of trade links with Western nations accompanied Soviet efforts to achieve military parity with the United States and recognition of the USSR as a legitimate superpower in the eyes of the Western world. At the same time that the Soviets engaged in an extensive military buildup, Brezhnev positioned the USSR as a champion of “peace” and an integral member of the European continent. Consistent with these goals, the Warsaw Pact revived the idea of holding a pan-European security conference in 1966. In negotiations that excluded U.S. participation, European states

would reach an agreement that formalized the territorial status quo in Europe and resulted in the dissolution of NATO and the Warsaw Pact.<sup>13</sup>

The United States and their Western European allies rejected these proposals on the grounds that they would legitimize Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and weaken Western European military security. The Brezhnev regime did little to allay these fears in 1968 when it sanctioned a Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia that crushed a communist reform movement known as the "Prague Spring." As if this invasion did not do enough to poison the atmosphere, Brezhnev next enunciated the "Brezhnev doctrine," which posited that the Soviet Union had the right and duty to prevent communist governments from reverting to capitalism or leaving the Warsaw Pact.

Even though the invasion of Czechoslovakia worried Western policymakers, Soviet leaders continued to search for a workable conference agenda in 1969 and 1970. At the time, the fear of a large-scale confrontation with China increased the determination of Soviet leaders to secure peace and stability in Europe.<sup>14</sup> They reiterated their interest in negotiating an agreement that recognized the inviolability of existing European frontiers and required signatories to renounce the use of force in settling disputes. To improve the chance of reaching these goals, the Soviets agreed to the participation of United States, Canada, East Germany, and West Germany in any conference.<sup>15</sup>

These Soviet proposals proved difficult for Western European policymakers to ignore, given larger developments in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis and disputes over the status of Berlin. Much like the United States, many of them had chosen to ease Cold War tensions through the pursuit of a *détente* with the Soviet Union and Eastern European governments. While their approaches varied considerably, nations such as France, Great Britain, and Belgium took a number of bilateral steps designed to improve East-West relations, such as increasing economic links and signing cooperative pledges with various communist nations. For example, the new West German government under the leadership of Willy Brandt officially began to pursue the policy of *Ostpolitik*. On the most basic level, this strategy involved using a mixture of negotiations, increased links in trade, and person-to-person exchanges to ease Cold War tensions and break down the barriers that divided Eastern and Western Europe.<sup>16</sup>

As they increasingly faced domestic critics at home who called into question the morality and legitimacy of the Cold War, Western European governments expressed their willingness to attend a European security conference.<sup>17</sup> Near the end of 1969, NATO in effect made it known that a conference would be possible if the following steps took place: the signing of a treaty dealing with the status of Berlin; the commencement of negotiations concerning conventional military force reductions in Europe (MBFR); and the completion of *Ostpolitik* treaties that codified West Germany's relationship with the Soviet Union and other Eastern European nations. Over the course of the next three years, all of these conditions were met.<sup>18</sup>

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With the MBFR framework in place and questions about the status of Germany addressed, the Nixon administration agreed to participate in the CSCE Multilateral Preparatory Talks (MPT) that began on 22 November 1972. Nixon and Kissinger made this decision to preserve unity in the NATO alliance, not because they favored the negotiations. This negative attitude grew out of how they viewed *détente*. Instead of embracing the CSCE negotiations or touting the benefits of creating multilateral structures to preserve peace in Europe, Nixon and Kissinger saw working closely with the Soviet Union as the best way to preserve the status quo in international relations and enhance European security.<sup>19</sup>

No example better illustrates this mindset than the U.S.-Soviet summit in Moscow that took place in May 1972. At this meeting, the United States and Soviet Union signed the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) I. They also signed the Agreement on Basic Principles. This agreement called for a “peaceful coexistence between the superpowers” and pledged each side to work toward agreements “that would assure stability rather than conflict between NATO and the Warsaw Pact.” The document also called on each government to improve their “mutual relations” and not to interfere in the other’s “internal affairs.”<sup>20</sup>

The Nixon administration’s approach to pursuing a *détente* with the Soviet Union left many Western European governments uneasy. On the whole, they feared that the superpowers would forge an “*entente*” that ignored Western European interests and perpetuated the status quo in Europe. To prevent this development, members of the European Community (EC) took a wide variety of steps to design and implement a European foreign policy that gave smaller nations like the Netherlands and Belgium more of a say in East-West relations. As part of this process, the EC advocated a “multilateral” version of *détente* that placed particular importance on increasing the level of trade, personal contacts, and exchanges between Eastern and Western Europe. Unlike U.S. and Soviet leaders who placed more importance on securing superpower cooperation, EC members stressed the importance of defending basic human rights and the principles of “representative democracy, the rule of law, and social justice.”<sup>21</sup> Given these positions, some authors argue that Western European governments deserve credit for formulating a “dynamic” conception of *détente* that held out the possibility of overcoming the status quo in Europe and improving the lives of all European citizens.<sup>22</sup>

The behavior of EC members during the negotiations that resulted in the signing of the Final Act lends plausibility to this argument. Although EC countries had many disagreements among themselves, they replaced NATO as the leading coordinator of Western delegations and defended the position that European security depended on far more than a U.S.-Soviet rapprochement. Acting as a “community of values,” they challenged the authority of the Soviet Union and the United States by holding fast to the



position that any final document had to include “strong texts on human rights and detailed commitments on contacts, travel, information, and family reunification.”<sup>23</sup>

The contents of the Final Act reveal the success EC members had in defending their vision of a “multilateral” *détente*. While not a formal treaty, the agreement pledged each signatory to follow a series of stipulations contained in four separate sections called “Baskets.” Basket I contained the ten guiding principles of signatory relations, whereas Basket II pledged each member to facilitate cooperation in the fields of economics, science, and the environment. Basket III called on each signatory to promote the free flow of information, ideas, and people among the participating states.

As several authors have pointed out in recent works, the language of Basket I did not endorse the permanence of existing boundaries or the political status quo in Europe. In addition to allowing boundary changes through peaceful means to take place, Principle VII marked the first time that “human rights were formally recognized in an international agreement as a fundamental principle regulating relations between states.”<sup>24</sup> It called on signatories to “promote and encourage” private citizens’ “exercise of civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and other rights and freedoms.” To further enhance the importance of human rights, it called on each signatory to act in conformity with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all United Nations covenants on human Rights. Even more striking, this principle confirmed the right of each individual to “know and act upon his rights” outlined in the Final Act. In theory, this stipulation gave private citizens the ability to cite the Helsinki Accords when attacking their governments’ human rights abuses.<sup>25</sup>

The language of Basket III outlined the importance that the EC placed on reducing the barriers that divided citizens in Eastern and Western Europe. For example, one provision called on signatory governments to expand the opportunities private citizens had to meet with and receive information from their counterparts. Another stipulation asked each nation to facilitate contacts among “religious faiths, institutions, and organizations” practicing “within the constitutional framework of participating states.” Along with calling for the signing of more cultural agreements, Basket III urged each participating state to “further the development of contacts and exchanges among young people.” It also mentioned each signatory’s need to increase “contacts among governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations and associations.”<sup>26</sup>

Even though the Final Act established no mechanism for punishing specific violations, the agreement indicated that each nation could not ignore certain provisions or entire baskets on the grounds that they violated their “sovereign rights.” It also reiterated that each of the principles in Basket I had “primary significance” and could not be interpreted without reference to each other. This clause reinforced the idea that progress in the implementation of one basket depended on equivalent progress in the other two