



The Final Act: The Helsinki Accords and the Transformation of the Cold War by Michael Cotey Morgan.

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The early 1970s presented a rare moment in international affairs. Global events and the desires of often antagonistic governments intersected to produce a most consequential gathering of world leaders. The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe's (CSCE) negotiations stretched over three years, involved thousands of staff and officials working primarily in Helsinki and Geneva, and often felt like diplomatic trench warfare, where every syllable and punctuation mark was contested and revised. Yet the CSCE's resolutions and compacts, known as the Helsinki Accords, actually did improve the transnational relations between Western and East Bloc countries and strengthen the underlying peace and security of the European nations involved. In *The Final Act*, Michael Cotey Morgan has written a definitive study of this gargantuan diplomatic endeavor.

The CSCE took so long to complete its work because its participants took on so many critical issues. These fell into three categories usually referred to as "Baskets." The first Basket concerned international security and the permanency of post-1945 national borders, the latter an area of greatest concern to the Soviet Union (chap. 4). Basket II held issues relating to economic, scientific, and environmental cooperation between East and West (chap. 5). The contents of Basket III were of especial interest to Western countries: human rights, freedom of movement, and intellectual and cultural exchanges between the Cold War rival blocs (chap. 6).

In the first half of his book (chaps. 1–3), Morgan offers an in-depth discussion of the historical context of the conference as well as insightful portraits of the postwar leaders who pushed toward its realization. Chapter 7 considers the yearly follow-up conferences and long-term legacies of the Helsinki Accords.

Morgan gives most of the credit for the creation and completion of the CSCE to General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Leonid Brezhnev: "The CSCE had originally been a Soviet idea, and Brezhnev had staked his reputation on its success" (1). Brezhnev wanted to solidify borders established at the end of World War II and thereby ensure the stability of the East European bloc and the legitimacy of the USSR. Soviet officials focused on long-term peace and security in Europe and the enshrining of Soviet hegemony over the East Bloc countries with an intensity that troubled its East European allies, who felt goals already largely accomplished were being bargained away. After all, the European borders, though not officially sanctioned, were under no threat of being revised any time soon.

Although the author certainly agrees with the East European allies' criticisms, he leaves no doubt that the Helsinki Accords most benefited the Western powers (5) and stresses Soviet capitulations to enlightened resolutions about human rights and freedom of movement:

The Soviets bowed to nearly every Western proposal. When the East Europeans read what their Soviet colleagues had negotiated on their behalf, they could not disguise their astonishment.... Brezhnev and [Andrei] Gromyko accepted [the proposals] because they wanted to bring the CSCE to an end. (188)

Brezhnev, in particular, had pursued this conference ever since the late 1960s. He saw its successful conclusion as a personal triumph and a highlight of his historical legacy.

History, of course, has vindicated both the East European's consternation and Morgan's judgment that Basket-III outcomes have had the largest and longest impact in the post-1975 era. In fact, soon after the ratification of the Helsinki Accords, the burgeoning dissident groups in various East Bloc countries—"the nascent Helsinki network" (223)—attempted to exploit the resolutions which promised greater economic and political freedoms. East German activist (and song writer) Karl Wolf Biermann tested the limits of such putative freedoms in 1976 and was promptly exiled; this was followed by a spike in exit-visa applications in the German Democratic Republic in the late 70s. Likewise, "Charter 77," under the leadership of Václav Havel, emerged as a significant voice and threat to the socialist government in Czechoslovakia in the years after the signing of the Helsinki Accords. In Poland, the CSCE resolutions encouraged the efforts of the incipient "Committee for the Defense of Workers," a precursor of the Solidarity movement a few years later (220–23).

Having crossed the threshold into the 1980s, Morgan might have gone on to discuss Mikhail Gorbachev and perhaps even the fall of the Berlin Wall as legacies of Helsinki. But he judiciously avoids such a teleological path, observing that "The Helsinki Final Act did not cause the end of the Cold War.... [However] the CSCE laid the foundations of a new, integrated international order" (253).

The Final Act demonstrates that this new order made possible both internal East Bloc resistance movements and international support for them in the 1980s. All readers with an interest in the last stages of the Cold War should read and ponder it carefully.