Moral Linkage:
The Impact of Transnational Networks on the Early Advocacy Campaigns of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee, 1978-1982

by Richard Cardinale

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Department of History
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

The University of Sydney

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This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

_______________________________________________________
Richard Cardinale
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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the influence that transnational networks had on the early advocacy campaigns of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee, from its founding in February 1979 through the Madrid follow-up Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which began in November 1980. An investigation of the organization’s early advocacy strategies reveals how contact between activists in the United States and the Soviet Union helped shape the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee’s presentation of Soviet human rights abuses to American audiences. U.S. Helsinki Watch utilized nongovernmental contact across transnational networks to advocate for greater human rights protections using a strategy I refer to as “moral linkage.” This strategy reframed the Soviets’ failure to observe such rights as an obstacle to greater cultural, educational and scientific exchanges between states, calling upon private organizations and individuals involved in such exchanges to insist that future cooperation be contingent upon the recognition of these rights.
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INTRODUCTION

On 1 August 1975, thirty-five heads of state and government from Europe and North America convened in Helsinki, Finland to sign the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)—a nearly three-year long multilateral negotiation that sought to minimize the possibility of military confrontations, and standardize a framework for greater technological, economic and cultural cooperation between states. The purpose of this conference was to offer a more complete reevaluation of the existing international order than that which had prevailed upon the European continent since the end of the Second World War. A comprehensive multilateral agreement in the areas of security, as well as technological and cultural cooperation, the conference was meant to standardize relations between participating states in the spirit of détente, thus helping to stabilize the Cold War balance of power and usher in a more robust and lasting peace.

The acceptance of the Helsinki Final Act fundamentally changed the nature of interstate relations during the Cold War in a way that was not fully understood at the time of its signing. This thesis is a study of one small part of that process of change. Throughout, I will demonstrate ways in which transnational concern for human rights developed among nongovernmental actors in the context of Helsinki activism. My research will focus primarily on the conduct of one American NGO that was established in response to the signing to the Final Act—the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee. Through an investigation of documentation relevant to the early advocacy campaigns of U.S. Helsinki Watch from its founding in February 1979 through the start of the Madrid follow-up conference to the CSCE in November 1980, this thesis will provide a clearer understanding of the tactics and approaches that were used to advance Western popular support for humanitarian reforms, as well as the degree to which these campaigns relied upon contacts across transnational networks in order to be effective.¹

¹There is some discrepancy among sources and scholars concerning the exact founding date of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee. The $400,000 Ford Foundation grant that was to fund the activities of the organization through its first two years was received in January 1979. This, according to Helsinki Watch Chairman Robert Bernstein, marked the moment that “Helsinki Watch was born.” However, the organization was by no means operational at this time, as it still did not have much of its executive committee in place, nor had it appointed an executive director. Other scholars have placed the organization’s founding to be as early
This research will shed new light on the nature of, and extent to which, interactions between American private citizens, U.S. government officials, and Soviet and East European dissidents helped to further a new approach to human rights advocacy in the aftermath of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act. At the foundation of this approach was the language of the Final Act itself, which provided a legitimizing basis for private citizens to call upon participating governments to honor their commitments to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. But what gave these calls their salience was the direct connection that could be drawn between the provision of these rights and the fulfillment of other cultural, economic, and scientific exchanges that were encouraged through the process of détente and the Final Act specifically. The U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee stressed this connection in the course of their human rights advocacy, using a strategic approach that I will refer to throughout this paper as “moral linkage.”

In the earliest years of its existence, U.S. Helsinki Watch relied heavily upon transnational networks to gather information and develop strategies in an attempt to recast thinking about Soviet human rights abuses in the minds of the American people. My research will provide new details concerning the process by which the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee set about this task, by investigating how the organization put into practice a personalizing, “case study” method that sought to maximize public empathy and support for victims of Soviet human rights abuses among American audiences. While such appeals to empathy were not themselves altogether new in the conduct of “Western” human rights

as July 1978, when a $25,000 planning grant, meant to finance the Helsinki group’s establishment, was issued by the Ford Foundation to Bernstein’s earlier human rights organization, the Fund for Free Expression. Throughout this work, I regard the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee’s founding to have taken place in February 1979, at the moment in which the group officially announced its formation to the public, and began acting as a proponent of human rights and the Helsinki Accords. Robert L. Bernstein, Speaking Freely: My Life in Publishing and Human Rights (New York: The New Press, 2016), 153; Peter Slezkine, “From Helsinki to Human Rights Watch: How an American Cold War Monitoring Group Became an International Human Rights Institution,” Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development 5, no. 3 (2014): 345–70.

2 For an analysis of Helsinki Watch’s strategies concerning organizational influence and effectiveness, see Claude E. Welch Jr., “Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch: A Comparison,” in Claude E. Welch Jr. ed., NGOs and Human Rights: Promise and Performance (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). This organizational approach to human rights advocacy, which relied upon bringing human rights abuses to the attention of communities that would have been unlikely to be exposed to them otherwise is also present in the NGO’s more recent advocacy campaigns. For example, see Barbara J. Keys, “Harnessing Human Rights to the Olympic Games: Human Rights Watch and the 1993 ‘Stop Beijing’ Campaign,” Journal of Contemporary History 53, no. 2 (2018): 415–38.
NGOs during this period, I will show how the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee used the public attention garnered through the presentation of these case studies to better pursue their strategy of “moral linkage.”³ U.S. Helsinki Watch reframed the Soviet’s abridgement of human rights as a fundamental obstacle to the ongoing efforts to develop more robust cultural, economic, and scientific exchanges between societies, and ultimately, greater global peace and security.

While the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee had a close working relationship with the U.S. government, this strategy of “moral linkage” was not conducted as a lobbying effort on the part of the organization aimed at influencing governmental policy, but rather was targeted toward private individuals and professional organizations that had had some role to play in this process of cultural exchange. While there had been significant collaboration during this time between Helsinki Watch and segments of the U.S. government, those lobbying and information-sharing efforts are beyond the scope of this study. Instead, this thesis will focus on how the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee encouraged new ways of framing human rights in the minds of the American people.

The Committee presented specific cases of Soviet and East European human rights abuse to American audiences as a failure of those governments to abide by their Helsinki obligations, rather than as a violation of some moral or ethical code.⁴ Infringement upon free expression by the Soviet state through the practice of literary censorship was not most often cast by the U.S. Helsinki Watch as a violation of a person’s inalienable right to speak their minds, but as an unnecessary obstacle to the free flow of information and ideas that was necessary to achieve greater cultural cooperation, and an undue burden for writers, publishers, and journalists on both sides of the Iron Curtain to continue to participate in such exchanges in good faith.⁵ Similarly, the involuntary institutionalization of Soviet

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⁵ For more on the Soviets’ use of censorship against political nonconformists, see Marianna T. Choldin and Maurice Friedberg, eds., The Red Pencil: Artists, Scholars and Censors in the USSR (Boston: Unwin Hyman,
dissidents in psychiatric hospitals, and the use of psychiatry for political purposes was not only presented to the American people as an abject exercise in inhumanity, but was detailed in advocacy efforts targeted specifically toward American psychological associations and mental health practitioners who had ongoing business ties to the Soviet bloc. Such appeals implored these groups to demand the rectification of such practices as a matter of professional integrity, and as a prerequisite to any future collaboration.6

It was the ability of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee to materialize concepts of human rights—which, prior to the mid-to-late 1970s remained somewhat relegated to the realm of the abstract and aspirational—that facilitated a change in American perceptions of what human rights advocacy implied. Framing violations of human rights as specific impediments to particular processes of cross-cultural exchange encouraged citizens to view the indemnification of these injustices as a series of concrete deliverables that could meaningfully be pursued in the here and now. Most importantly, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee helped to institutionalize the notion that pressure for corrective action could be effectively applied, not only by the U.S. government through international exchange and foreign policy pronouncements, but also by private individuals and organizations who felt compelled by their own sense of values to see such commitments upheld, and who were in a position to exert direct leverage through other areas of cross-cultural cooperation.7

When the 35-nation multilateral negotiations that became the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe began in Helsinki on 22 November 1972, international

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human rights issues garnered little attention among the majority of American citizens. By the conclusion of conference almost three years later in the summer of 1975, the American attitude toward the talks or their result had changed little. The predominant opinion of U.S. policymakers and the vast majority of the American public was that the Soviets had gotten the better of the negotiations, having secured commitments from the West respecting the inviolability of frontiers and the territorial integrity of participating states, while simultaneously agreeing to the non-intervention in the internal affairs of others—Principles III, IV, and VI of the Final Act’s Declaration Guiding Relations between Participating States, respectively. In return, the Western participants received vague promises from the members of the Warsaw Pact acknowledging the future possibility of the alteration of borders through peaceful means and “in accordance with international law,” as well as a commitment to demonstrate greater respect for the “human rights and fundamental freedoms” of individual citizens, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

In the weeks leading up to President Ford’s signing of the Final Act, popular dissatisfaction with the conference’s results was palpable. In the days prior the summit meeting, the New York Times ran an article declaring that “the 35-nation Conference on Security in Cooperation in Europe . . . should not have happened. Never have so many struggled for so long over so little.” And yet less than three decades later, when recalling the events of the late Cold War, the former U.S. Congressman and participant in the 1980 Madrid follow up conference to the CSCE, Robert Drinan was willing to assert that “support

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8 These were the preparatory agenda-setting talks that presaged the formal start of negotiations, which began in Geneva on 18 September 1973. Richard Davy, “Helsinki Myths: Setting the Record Straight on the Final Act of the CSCE, 1975,” Cold War History 9, no. 1 (2009) 2.
for human rights in the Helsinki Accords made the collapse of the Communist system inevitable.”

What can account for such a dramatic incongruity between the expectations that existed concerning the significance of the Helsinki Accords and their appraisal afterward? Why were nongovernmental actors able to invoke the articles of the Final Act to such great effect, and how did their calls for human rights reforms resonate so powerfully through the framework of a non-legally binding agreement? Over the years, scholars have singled out many aspects of the Final Act for their novelty and revolutionary character, in an attempt to explain the substantial and unanticipated effect that the agreements ultimately had. For some, the requirement of mutual consensus among delegations set forth during the negotiations’ preparatory talks—as opposed to a less onerous threshold requiring only a simple majority of support to secure the inclusion of any provision or specific use of language within the conference’s concluding document—is one condition that has often been cited as having had a profound impact on the form the agreement ultimately took. This provision is what allowed the smaller Western European states to collectively negotiate during the conference as a unified bloc, ultimately securing within the final agreement terms that most reflected key Western values, such as the principle guiding relations between states that explicitly called upon governments to show “respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” of their own citizens. Never before this had the conduct of a state government toward its own people been considered as a legitimate subject of examination for interstate cooperation.


Still others have focused on more procedural elements of the Final Act when seeking to explain its transformative effect upon the existing international environment. For instance, in one of the ten principles guiding relations between states that composed the first section, or “Basket,” of the agreement, negotiators concluded that all principles set forth in these declarations would be of “primary significance,” and “equally and unreservedly applied” with respect to one another. The language recognizing the inviolability of frontiers, non-interference in internal affairs, or sovereign equality of all states from taking precedence over a participating government’s commitment to ensure respect for human rights of all its citizens. Another area of scholarly focus emphasizes the agreement’s so-called “Fourth Basket,” which laid out procedures for the follow up mechanism of the CSCE, calling for periodic review meetings to be conducted in a way that could monitor and assess the status of implementation. These follow on CSCE review conferences served as the basis for which a host of national, international and nongovernmental institutions and organizations set about monitoring participating states’ full and forthright compliance with the terms of the Final Act. Over time this system of official and unofficial oversight would come to collectively be known as the “Helsinki process.” While some scholars restrict their use of this term to refer exclusively to the follow up conferences called for in the Final Act, others use it more holistically when describing the overall system of governmental and nongovernmental efforts utilized to ensure Helsinki implementation. My use of the term will conform to this more inclusive interpretation.

Yet for all the consequential language that has been scrutinized since the Final Act was formally accepted into the international lexicon, one aspect of the agreement that has received considerably less attention by scholars has been the recognition of individual

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15 “Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe Final Act.”
citizens’ responsibility to “know and act upon [their] rights and duties” with respect to the Final Act’s humanitarian provisions. This was a key concept that would later be seen by private citizens as an explicit endorsement of the positive role that individuals had to play in ensuring the fulfillment of their government’s international obligations. Critically, this was not the responsibility of a citizen to his or her own government, but rather that of an individual—without distinction as to nationality, ideology, or belief—to the maintenance of a new, mutually-agreed upon international order. The right “to know and to act” was regularly invoked by private citizens’ Helsinki monitoring organizations in both the East and the West as the legitimizing basis for which these groups conducted their oversight of governments’ compliance with respect to the Final Act. Ultimately, this provision contributed to the growing transnational character of Helsinki-based human rights activism in the aftermath of the Final Act, as it more forcefully asserted the place of the individual as an independent interest holder, irrespective of national boundaries or ideological divisions.

The right of individuals “to know and to act” is proclaimed in Principle VII of the Final Act’s ten-point Basket I declaration, which enumerates states’ commitment to respect the “human rights and fundamental freedoms” of their citizens, and sanctifies the role of the individual in working toward the achievement of this aim. Yet this is not the only place in which the contributive role of the individual is expressly asserted. Again in Principle IX, which sets forth the terms governing cooperation between participating states in areas of “economic, scientific, technological, social, cultural and humanitarian fields,” the document affirms that “governments, institutions, organizations and persons have a relevant and positive role to play” in contributing toward the achievement of progress within these

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18 "Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe Final Act."
20 For more on intersectionalities of authority and obligation between the individual, the state, and the international community, see Roland Burke, “The Internationalism of Human Rights,” in Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin eds., Internationalisms: A Twentieth Century History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
different areas. These provisions of the Final Act, which acknowledge the individual as a legitimate arbiter of aspects of interstate cooperation, are central to my argument, as they provide the conceptual starting point for nongovernmental involvement in the process of Helsinki implementation, and serve as the foundation upon which the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee’s strategy of “moral linkage” was based.

The new international normative framework introduced by these and other innovative provisions of the Final Act was a key area of research for many of the earliest scholarly works on this subject. As nongovernmental “Helsinki activists”—first in the Soviet Union, and then elsewhere—started to stand up and make their voices heard, invoking the text of the Final Act when demanding greater respect for human rights from their governments, Western observers began to reexamine their own views on the power and possibilities inherent in the agreement. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, international relations scholars and political theorists were the first to look back upon the negotiations of the CSCE and the agreement that they produced, to ask what role, if any, these developments played in contributing to the unexpected outcome of the Cold War.

The earliest studies of the CSCE and the Helsinki process stressed the revolutionary language and structure of the Final Act itself, attributing the transformative power of the agreement to the new international norms that it established, with significantly less

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21 “Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe Final Act.”
attention paid to the individuals who invoked them. By the late 2000s, with the declassification of many previously unreleased documents in a number of different countries, the first true archival histories of the CSCE and the Helsinki process began to be written. These works tended to focus mostly on the diplomatic wrangling that produced the Helsinki Accords, the various roles that different states played during the negotiations, and the larger geopolitical implications of those decisions.

The sheer amount of official records generated over the two and a half years of CSCE negotiations, in which nearly three-dozen different governments participated has ensured that no shortage of archival research has been possible for historians to engage in. Because of this preponderance of documentation, diplomatic and political histories of the CSCE and the Helsinki process continue to dominate the field, even to this day. Conversely, my research will depart from these state-centric approaches, and instead focus on nongovernmental involvement in the Helsinki process at the tactical and strategic level. Specifically, I will explore how one NGO in particular utilized contact across transnational networks to promote a heightened sense of responsibility among American audiences for demanding greater protections of human rights internationally.

25 Most notably, William Korey’s book, *The Promises We Keep: Human Rights, the Helsinki Process, and American Foreign Policy* used the framework of the CSCE follow up meetings to explore the shifting foreign policy strategies of the American and Soviet governments with respect to human rights issues between the years of 1975 and 1991. This work continues to serve as an important distillation of many of key events concerning the Helsinki process at the governmental level. In 2001, political scientist Daniel C. Thomas published a more in-depth examination of how the new norms set forth in the Helsinki Accords were integrated into the existing international landscape and impacted geopolitical events. His book, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism*, stresses the unforeseen nature of the Final Act’s influence, its ability to unify disparate groups with distinctive identities, and its direct contribution to the ultimate demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.


While other studies of the CSCE and the impact of the Helsinki activism have engaged directly with the role of nongovernmental actors within the Helsinki process, the tendency has been to treat nongovernmental involvement as an important, but largely contingent force in the emergence of a new international normative framework surrounding human rights. For many of these scholars, the benchmark of effectiveness for these organizations has been their ability to inform and influence state governments, whose subsequent action was the real locus of reform. In Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink’s landmark Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics (1998), the authors describe what they refer to as the “boomerang effect,” in which nongovernmental actors blocked from effective engagement with their own government seek redress through contact with ideologically aligned forces across transnational advocacy networks, which possess the opportunities to apply pressure on the offending government from abroad. While the authors acknowledge that pressure on these repressive governments can originate from outside private actors directly, the vast majority of influence identified by this study is ultimately administered through various political institutions, where states serve as the primary agents of change.

Keck and Sikkink’s model is highly applicable to the post-Helsinki international environment, and as such, has often served as an important theoretical framework for historians investigating the emergence of transnational advocacy networks during this period. Perhaps most significantly, Sarah Snyder’s Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War (2011), relies heavily upon the theoretical models set forth in Activists Beyond Borders when explaining how transnational human rights advocacy developed and


29 For examples, see Korey, The Promises We Keep; Peterson, Globalizing Human Rights.


functioned in the context of Helsinki activism. Snyder’s approach is holistic, weaving a convincing narrative concerning the process of transnational human rights advocacy from the signing of the Helsinki Final Act to the fall of the Soviet Union. Throughout her work, Snyder frames Western nongovernmental organizations as but one single force operating within a larger political milieu of both formal and informal mechanisms that collectively contributed to a shift in international attitudes towards Helsinki and questions of human rights. Although she explores the contribution of relevant NGOs in some detail, Snyder’s work ultimately remains a history “from above,” as the involvement of these nongovernmental organizations is presented largely in relation to the political and diplomatic pressure that was applied by state governments and policymakers in the course of the Helsinki follow up conferences.32

In contrast, my work will focus on the ways in which nongovernmental organizations like U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee promoted support for the protection of human rights among private groups and citizens. This approach will help to elucidate the power and limits of human agency within the Helsinki process, and will explore the extent to which groups like the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee took seriously the provision for individuals to “know and act upon” their rights set forth in the Final Act. By emphasizing such an approach, my research will provide a more granular analysis of the specific conduct, motivations and strategies employed by individual human rights activists, which will help to shed more light on the different contexts in which they operated, and the conditions that constrained their behavior.

For a concept whose meaning is so heavily contested, so selectively interpreted, and so fraught with ambiguity, the term “human rights” nevertheless resonated meaningfully at key moments throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Evoking powerful associations among people and governments in almost every corner the world, by the end of the 1970s, this universal moral currency helped pay the way for a panoply of different political, cultural and ethical causes—all asserting human rights as the legitimizing justification for their efforts. The term became a rallying cry for a host of national liberation movements, political projects, and struggles for ethnic self-determination. Given

32 See Snyder, Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War, particularly chapters 4 and 5.
then the various purposes for which human rights have been invoked, it is important that we as historians be mindful of the distinct constructions and contestations of these claims when seeking to explain their utility to the claimants, or their significance to the broader public. Most of all, we must be wary of how the successes and failures of these earlier projects have impacted the way we think about human rights today.33

In his book The Conservative Human Rights Revolution: European Identity, Transnational Politics, and the Origins of the European Convention (2017), Marco Duranti demonstrates how international human rights projects can be utilized to further a domestic political agenda—even at the transnational level. Elite driven, and conservative in nature, Duranti shows how the efforts to establish the European Convention on Human Rights served to strengthen the place of embattled politicians in both France and Great Britain by prioritizing the institutionalization of certain rights while minimizing the inclusion of others. In The Conservative Human Rights Revolution, Duranti deconstructs many of the prevailing characterizations typically ascribed to human rights projects and actors, and instead offers a more complex and nuanced explanation of the post-war European human rights project. This approach has been helpful to bear in mind when considering transnational human rights advocacy in the highly politically and ideologically charged environment of the 1970s, and the context of East-West exchange.34

The revisionist scholarship of Samuel Moyn, beginning with The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History (2010), forged the way for new debates on the origins, character, and qualities of human rights, and helping scholars to reimagine how these ideas should be viewed within the study of history. Moyn argues that the explosion of human rights interest in the 1970s was highly contingent upon the failures of previous ideologies which claimed to offer utopian visions for their adherents’ future.35 For Moyn, there are moments when modern notions of human rights can and should be considered as a spontaneous product of chance events. While this interpretation has its detractors, by relinquishing the need to situate the study of human rights in history within a grand narrative, this approach

has helped scholars to avoid the teleological tendency to try and contextualize the events of the past within the exalted legacy of our society’s presently held belief in human rights, and instead more critically engage with these values and their historical significance *prima facie*, by considering the utilitarian purpose that they may have served to those who invoked them.\(^{36}\)

Revisiting the history of human rights in its American political context, Barbara Keys’ *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (2014) argues that the renewed American interest in human rights in the mid–to–late 1970s was, at its foundation, a consequence of the moral and cultural uncertainty produced by the events of the previous decade—the contentious battle for civil rights, Nixon’s Watergate scandal, and above all, the American involvement in the Vietnam War. Here, a link to the Moynian view of human rights is clearly distinguishable. But whereas Moyn sees the gravitation toward human rights at this time and the existing state of politics in the United States as forces acting against one another, Keys’ analysis navigates the political landscape of the American body politic, stressing the unification of these two concepts.

Throughout her narrative, Keys threads a clear link between the redemptive ideals of human rights projects, and the pragmatic political purpose that they served for those who invoked them. *Reclaiming American Virtue* thus presents an in-depth look into how U.S. Congressional leaders from both parties and across the political spectrum utilized the language of human rights to at once ameliorate the sense of dissatisfaction and anxiety concerning America’s recent conduct in world affairs, while still helping to serve their concrete domestic political objectives.\(^{37}\) Keys’ work has served to provide a foundation for my own research. While Keys addresses the involvement of nongovernmental actors within the development of events under investigation throughout the course of her book, the extent of the transnational influence and cooperation that these organizations relied upon in the course of their collaboration with members of the U.S. government is one area in which closer examination is possible. My study will seek to illuminate such processes in

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greater detail, and contribute to a more complete picture of the nature of human rights activism in the 1970s and 80s.

In his study of rights claims among Soviet dissidents, Benjamin Nathans suggests the need to seriously consider the “polycentric character of human rights history,” and properly appreciate the nuance inherent in each particular case. Daniel Sargent takes a similar view when making a case for the unique set of circumstances that contributed to the reemergence of human rights in American politics during the 1970s, which was most clearly articulated in the foreign policy formulations of the Carter administration. Sargent sees human rights as neither strictly the consequence of unforeseeable accidents, nor the inevitable inheritance of age-old values inherent to the human condition. Instead, he argues that effective human rights campaigns take hold when conditions are just right—at times when certain “cracks” appear in the international landscape that allow deeply held moral, ethical and philosophical principles to bubble up to produce the conditions that can support a flourishing human rights movement.

These interpretations offer many compelling prospects for the future scholarship of human rights history because, as Sargent himself puts it, they “acknowledges both the specificity in place and time of particular human rights eruptions and their connectedness to deeper wells of action and thought.” In addition to helping to address the critical impasse that has long existed among scholars concerning the question of human rights origins, this approach is particularly useful for my purposes, for its ability to reconcile the dualistic nature of human rights claims—at once highly relativistic and unique to the social and cultural conditions from which they emerge, while still capable of invoking deeply held beliefs, possessing of the kind of universalistic appeal that can resonate globally in meaningful ways.

The thesis is structured roughly chronologically, with each chapter uncovering more of the national and transnational factors that catalyzed the genesis of U.S. Helsinki Watch and its strategies. In Chapter 1, I examine the U.S. government’s attitudes toward private

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40 Ibid.
citizen involvement in the promotion of international human rights issues in the years leading up to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, and discuss policymakers’ initial expectations concerning a U.S.-based Helsinki monitoring organization. The purpose of this chapter is twofold: to demonstrate the degree to which U.S. governmental officials helped to influence the creation of a nongovernmental Helsinki monitoring group within the United States, and to illustrate the unanticipated role the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee would come to play as a Western nongovernmental organization advocating for Helsinki compliance. In Chapter 2, I trace the development of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee’s advocacy campaigns during the first several months of the organization’s existence. I discuss both the challenges and opportunities that presented themselves during this time, and highlight the importance of transnational contact to the organization’s early effectiveness. In Chapter 3, I investigate the impact of these transnational contacts upon the development of future advocacy campaigns, as well as larger organization-defining activism strategies, which strove to reframe the costs of international human rights abuses in the minds of American audiences. Ultimately, contact with activists across transnational networks combined with group members’ domestic personal and professional influence helped the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee further new approaches for the defense of human rights by stressing their importance to meaningful and forthright cross-cultural cooperation in other fields.
CHAPTER ONE:

THE RISE OF THE U.S. PRIVATE SECTOR IN THE HELSINKI PROCESS

The signing of the Helsinki Final Act presented new approaches to existing international challenges—perhaps none more significant than the increased involvement of nongovernmental actors in the process of interstate cooperation. The novelty of an international agreement that expressly called upon the individual to “know and act upon his rights,” as stipulated in the Final Act’s Declaration of Principles had far-reaching consequences for participating states in both the East and the West.¹ This chapter will discuss the evolving attitudes of U.S. government officials concerning the role played by private institutions, organizations, and individuals within the Helsinki process from the period immediately following the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in August 1975, to the proposed creation of a U.S.-based Helsinki monitoring body in the spring of 1978. This analysis will highlight the influence that individuals in political and cultural fields had upon this process, focusing specifically on the perspectives of Congressional leaders, State Department officials, private citizens, and representatives of the U.S. delegation participating in the first follow-up conference to the CSCE.

U.S. governmental support for private citizen participation in the Helsinki process was initially most encouraged in the area of cultural cooperation between states—increased contact between publishers, journalists, academics and artists—as well as through the promotion of a more robust system of cross-cultural information exchange, involving the increased planning and organization of international cultural events.²

¹ "Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe Final Act."
American policymakers’ support for such programs was particularly reflected in statements made by the U.S. Congressional Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, in their recommendations to the U.S. delegation participating in the first follow-up conference, held in Belgrade in 1977. During those negotiations at Belgrade, many of Washington’s Western European allies favored a similar approach to nongovernmental involvement in the Helsinki process. Yet in the aftermath of Belgrade, when significant and organized nongovernmental support for the Helsinki Accords *did* begin to emerge from the U.S. private sector, the participation of these nongovernmental organizations differed from the early formulations of policymakers in some distinct ways. In terms of tactics, these groups more closely resembled their Eastern European and Soviet counterparts than they did earlier Western nongovernmental efforts concerning the promotion of human rights. The goal of this chapter will be firstly, to define the nature of the differences between earlier Western nongovernmental human rights advocacy and that which had emerged in the aftermath of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, and secondly to offer explanations for the divergence between expectation and reality in regards to nongovernmental participation in the Helsinki process.

I begin this chapter by discussing the circumstances that led New Jersey Congresswoman Millicent Fenwick to propose the creation of the U.S. Congressional Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe—an innovative intergovernmental committee composed of bicameral, bipartisan Congressional membership, as well as appointed representation from each of the Departments of State, Commerce and Defense. I then investigate the process by which that Commission came to understand the role of nongovernmental actors in encouraging greater Helsinki compliance. This analysis of the Commission’s early relationship with various nongovernmental actors will illustrate how, in the immediate aftermath of the signing of the Final Act, the expectation of American policymakers with regard to private citizen participation in the promotion of human rights conformed to traditional notions of nongovernmental involvement and support for U.S. policy initiatives that had existed up to that point. Overwhelmingly, this meant interaction

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with particular special interest groups whose memberships and mandates were most often narrowly defined along ethnic, national or religious lines.\textsuperscript{4}

The Commission’s early efforts toward engaging with members of the U.S. private sector will demonstrate the somewhat circumscribed and limited role that was initially expected of nongovernmental groups within the context of the Helsinki process—an approach and would have likely contributed to a general fragmentation and compartmentalization of nongovernmental human rights advocacy by “single-issue” organizations, possessing little reach outside their own particular identity communities and thus exerting a negligible impact on American public perceptions of the Helsinki Accords \textit{en masse}.\textsuperscript{5} I will then go on to explore the conduct of the U.S. delegation at the first follow up conference to the CSCE held in Belgrade from October 1977 to March 1978, with a particular focus on the actions of Arthur J. Goldberg, who served as Ambassador-at-large

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\item \textsuperscript{4} For specific examples of the ways in which special interest groups exerted pressure on U.S. policymakers during this time, see Gal Beckerman, \textit{When They Come for Us, We’ll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry} (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010), particularly chapters 7 and 8; Joe Renouard, \textit{Human Rights in American Foreign Policy: From the 1960s to the Soviet Collapse} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), particularly chapter 2. For a more comprehensive analysis of the type of relationship that special interest groups traditionally had with the process of U.S. foreign policymaking generally, see Keys, \textit{Reclaiming American Virtue}.
\item \textsuperscript{5} One notable exception to the limited resonance that specific human rights concerns had among the majority of the American people is the matter of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union. This was an issue that, for a time, enjoyed mass public attention in the United States, culminating most visibly in widespread support for the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Trade Act of 1974, which linked the Soviet Union’s eligibility for Most-Favored Nation trading status to that government’s consent domestically for Soviet Jews wishing to emigrate. Sarah Snyder attributes the American public’s captivation with this issue to be a consequence of the country’s unique historical experience regarding concern for the protection of religious freedom, as well as evidence of the outsized influence that particular ethnic groups had through governmental lobbying during this time. Samuel Moyn has suggested elsewhere that such a degree of popular support for this particular cause can be understood by viewing it as a historical legacy of the Holocaust. But whatever the explanation, it is important to remember that, despite the issue’s genuine resonance among a wide variety of citizens, this was not support that was primarily generated by nongovernmental actors themselves, but was rather a campaign publicized and pursued by Congressional policymakers, which undeniably served distinct partisan goals of conservative Democrats within the context of American domestic politics. For that reason, while this was a human rights issue that took hold among large swathes of the U.S. population at this time, the initiative that brought this issue so sharply into focus should be distinguished from the kind of widespread grassroots nongovernmental human rights advocacy that was common in the latter part of the decade and that is the focus of this study. Sarah B. Snyder, \textit{From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed U.S. Foreign Policy} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 25; Samuel Moyn, \textit{The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 83. For more information on the details surrounding the proposal and passage of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment and its important place in the history of human rights during the 1970s, see; Keys, \textit{Reclaiming American Virtue}; Jeff Bloodworth, “Senator Henry Jackson, the Solzhenitsyn Affair, and American Liberalism,” \textit{The Pacific Northwest Quarterly} 97, no. 2 (2006): 69–77; Daniel Sargent, \textit{A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) particularly chapter 7; Snyder, \textit{Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War}, particularly chapter 2.
\end{itemize}
for the U.S. delegation. Goldberg’s promotion of human rights on the international stage over the course of his impressive career as a public servant is presented briefly, before moving on to discuss his takeaways from the Belgrade Conference.6

Goldberg returned from Belgrade disappointed by the American media’s rather negative presentation of the Belgrade Conference and the persisting unpopularity of the Helsinki Accords in the minds of the majority of U.S. citizens.7 To combat these developments, the former Ambassador took steps to establish a nongovernmental group that could assist in the public promotion of the Helsinki Accords, thus providing U.S. policymakers with the mandate necessary to more forcefully pursue Western interests pertaining to the Helsinki Accords in the course of their interstate relations. This chapter will conclude with a description of the steps taken by Goldberg to realize this plan, and by introducing the reader to the man whose organization was chosen for this purpose—Robert L. Bernstein. Understanding Bernstein’s background helps to illustrate the kind of unique advantages that many members of what would become the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee enjoyed, by virtue of their social and professional positions of prominence. These advantages would prove to be indispensible to the development of tactics and strategies that the group would use to pursue their promotion of human rights in the Soviet bloc. The details of such strategies will be discussed further in the following chapter.

THE HELSINKI PROCESS IN ACTION

Less than a week after the Helsinki Final Act was signed, a nineteen-member Congressional delegation travelled to Romania, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union as part of an East-West Interparliamentary exchange in the spirit of the Final Act. Among the U.S. representatives on the trip was first-term Republican Congresswoman from New Jersey, Millicent Fenwick. Born to an aristocratic family, Fenwick enjoyed a privileged, somewhat sheltered upbringing largely unconcerned with politics. It was not until the rise of Adolf Hitler that Fenwick realized the tremendous influence that politics could have over a

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7 For examples, see Ibid.; Arthur J. Goldberg, Letter to the Editor, The Economist, 4 February 1978.
society. Germany’s experience with fascism, and the Nazi party’s inhumanity toward its own citizens instilled in Fenwick the belief that a government’s most important responsibility lay in its obligation to ensure justice for its citizens. As an adult living in her home state of New Jersey, Fenwick became involved in local and state politics. Guided by this principle, she fought vociferously for social issues such as civil rights and prison reform.  

During her trip to the USSR, it was this self-described “obsession” with justice that led Fenwick to press Soviet officials about their government’s treatment of political dissidents, as well as the degree to which the state was taking steps to begin to fulfill its commitments to the recently signed Helsinki Accords. This concern for the rights of oppressed Soviet citizens also compelled Fenwick to seek out in-person meetings with members of the Soviet dissident community. Word of the Congresswoman’s sympathies spread quickly, and as a result, political dissidents and refuseniks—members of the Soviet Jewish community who had been denied by their government permission to emigrate—travelled to Moscow from as far away as Odessa to seek an audience with Fenwick.

After returning to the United States, Fenwick would often recount in speeches and interviews the heart-rending experience of meeting with these dissidents, and coming face to face with the casualties of Soviet repression: “You read about an automobile accident and you’re shocked. But you come upon that accident and see the blood on the victims and hear their cries—how different it is. Well that’s what it was like to go to Russia and hear the cries of all these desperate people.” Elsewhere, Fenwick described the concern she felt for these Soviet citizens, and the moral imperative that she believed existed for those in the West to lend them some assistance: “it’s like being on a transatlantic steamer in the middle of a terrible storm, and seeing people go by in rafts, and we are trying to pick them

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up, but can’t. But at least we have our searchlights on them.”\textsuperscript{11}

Fenwick felt moved by what she considered to be America’s responsibility as a fellow signatory of the Helsinki Final Act to ensure all states’ compliance with the terms of an agreement that so many in the East had come to pin their hopes upon. On 5 September 1975, the New Jersey Congresswoman introduced legislation onto the floor of the House proposing the establishment of a Congressional body whose responsibility would be to monitor states’ fulfillment of the Helsinki Final Act. After nine months of wrangling through the legislature, the bill to establish a Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe was signed into law by President Ford on 3 June 1976.\textsuperscript{12}

Although few at the time realized, by the spring and summer of 1976, subtle changes to the existing international order which began with the signing of the Helsinki Final Act were beginning to take effect, as the searchlight of world public opinion affixed itself ever more brightly upon a small group of individuals far behind the Iron Curtain, who remained committed to the idea that individual rights were not matters to be resolved solely in relations between a state and its citizens, but rather concerned the peace and stability of the entire world.\textsuperscript{13} In time, this concern would expand beyond the bounds of governmental authority and obligation, and take shape as a social movement of transnational proportions.

The 1976 law that gave birth to the Helsinki Commission, as it came to be known, authorized and directed the Congressional body to “monitor the acts of the signatories which reflect compliance with or violation of the articles of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, with particular regard to the provisions relating to Cooperation in Humanitarian Fields.” In addition, this law further authorized the Commission to “encourage the development of programs and activities of the United States Government and private organizations with a view toward . . . [achieving] a greater interchange of people and ideas between East and West.”\textsuperscript{14} In practice, the Commission made no secret about their intention to emphasize the humanitarian articles of the Final

\textsuperscript{11} Quoted in Goldberg, \textit{The Final Act}, 61.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, 62-63; Schapiro, \textit{Millicent Fenwick: Her Way}, 175.
Act, which in part reflected a perceived responsibility felt by some in Congress to serve as a check on some of the more questionable foreign policy priorities of the Kissinger State Department. This commitment to do more to guarantee humanitarian protections for disadvantaged or oppressed groups in other countries also demonstrated the rising influence among congressional constituencies of émigré organizations and special interest groups in the United States during this time.\textsuperscript{15}

In an onslaught of Congressional activity, in the period between January and June 1977 alone, the Helsinki Commission called 56 witnesses to testify over the course of 14 different Committee hearings, and administered more than 1,100 surveys to recent Soviet emigrants, journalists, and U.S. companies involved in East-West trade.\textsuperscript{16} Further guided by the law’s dual mandate, the Commission arranged as part of its first overseas trip a small Study Mission whose goal would be to investigate the current status of implementation of the humanitarian provisions of the Final Act elsewhere throughout Europe. With the first review conference of the CSCE quickly approaching, Commission members undertook this trip so that they might better understand what actions other signatory states were taking in order to more fully comply with the humanitarian articles set forth in the Helsinki Accords, and to assist the U.S. delegation participating in the review in determining negotiating strategies which might best ensure unified Western interests in the upcoming negotiations at Belgrade.\textsuperscript{17}

The Mission met with government officials and parliamentarians from 18 different European states (all from the West with the exception of Yugoslavia, the site of the upcoming review meeting), as well as a number of private organizations and individuals. These private citizens’ organizations represented émigré communities, Eastern European


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.; “Implementation of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: Findings and Recommendations Two Years After Helsinki.”

\textsuperscript{17} The Study Mission consisted of five members of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, including its Chair, Rep. Dante Fascell (D-FL), Co-Chair Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-RI), Rep. John Bingham (D-NY), Rep. Paul Simon (D-IL), and the Congresswoman responsible for proposing the creation of the Commission, Rep. Millicent Fenwick (R-NJ). For a more detailed analysis of the Commission’s work, see Snyder, \textit{Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War}, particularly chapter 2.
exiles, journalists, and businessmen who could offer insights into the current state of East-West cooperation. The Mission found that, among the European governmental representatives with whom they met, there was virtual unanimity in the belief that the Helsinki Final Act had yielded more concrete positive results than anyone had anticipated at the time of its summit-level signing in August 1975. This unanticipated efficacy existed in spite of what the Mission found to be a profound sense of skepticism in the Helsinki process on the part of Western European and American publics, who—despite the optimism of many of their elected officials—largely maintained the belief that the agreements had little value to the Western powers, and had only served to authorize the Soviets’ territorial ambitions in Eastern Europe.18

The Helsinki Commission’s final report summarizing the Study Mission’s findings described the Western European states’ “high degree of official interest in the CSCE aftermath,” and policymakers’ “unanimously positive assessment of [the Final Act’s] long-term potential.” And yet despite this, the Study Mission was particularly struck by the noticeable lack of public promotion being done to improve popular perception and generate demand for more complete implementation on the part of all the signatories. The Commission report remarked that “the same officials who are today most sanguine about CSCE prospects are those who failed 15 months ago to communicate their hopes for the accords to the broader public,” and warned that “a continuation of government silence over CSCE in the months leading to [the Belgrade follow-up conference] could lead an already disenchanted public once again to reject the opportunities and advantages inherent in long-term Western commitment to implement the Helsinki accords.”19

Even those Foreign Ministry representatives who most favored a restrained Western approach at Belgrade for fear of provoking the Soviets could not deny that their bargaining positions at the conference would be substantially weakened without some degree of vocal public concern and support of their efforts. Overall, this failure by Western governments to sufficiently promote the value of the Helsinki agreements to their people resulted in what the Study Mission had described as “uninformed disinterest” among these

19 Ibid.
countries’ populations. This negligence, the report’s authors concluded, deprived Western negotiators of “what may turn out to be the most effective Helsinki-implementer at all: informed public opinion.”

DOMESTIC IMPLICATIONS FOR NONGOVERNMENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE HELSINKI PROCESS

Although the Study Mission’s report focused on European states’ promotion of the Helsinki Accords in their own countries, the implications for American society were clear, since public interest in the Helsinki Accords fared no better in the United States at this time than it did in Europe. This lack of public promotion for Helsinki Accords in the U.S. was further compounded by the fact that, compared to many of the European capitals, there seemed to exist little interest in the potential of the Helsinki process even at the official level, with almost no demonstrable effort made by the United States to take the lead in developing a unified Western strategy for the CSCE follow-up meetings. “Except in the workings of the NATO political commission,” the Study Mission’s report found, “the American voice is little heard in European councils and consultation on the meaning and future of the Helsinki pact. While Western European officials themselves demonstrate an awareness of the real and potential utility of the CSCE undertakings in patterning and improving the East-West dialogue, they report little evidence of such interest or optimism from Washington.”

In recommending action that could reverse such a trend, the Study Mission’s report suggested ways in which participating states could enlist help from particular areas of civil society, whose professional experiences could provide key insights into the challenges facing a more forthright multilateral exchange among Helsinki signatories abroad, and whose public stature, they believed, could better help mobilize public opinion back home:

If medical associations, editorial boards of publishing houses, scholarly societies, journalists’ groups, travel agencies and universities were more aware of the specific Basket II and III opportunities for contact and exchange with the East, it is possible that they would take a more active and effective role in opening many more doors.

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20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
than a limited number of diplomats can ever hope to do. Perhaps such private initiatives, similar to those the Commission has been mandated by law to encourage, will only be rebuffed. But without attempting them, we cannot know.\footnote{These conclusions demonstrate an early conception by policymakers of the value of non-state actors and their involvement in the Helsinki process. These positive attitudes would later prove to be crucial in fostering governmental support for private citizens’ Helsinki advocacy groups by the late 1970s. \textit{Ibid.}}

In its report, the Study Mission also described the extent of its contacts with various intergovernmental organizations, policy think tanks, individuals, and special interest groups, including the European Cooperation Research Group, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Aspen Institute in Berlin, Keston College, and the World Council of Churches. Loosely defined in the report as a community of “private Helsinki watchers,” these were individuals and groups that had some stake in seeing participating state governments abide by their Helsinki commitments—recent Soviet exiles, refugee organizations, businessmen active in East-West trade, journalists, and researchers. What had impressed members of the Study Mission most in their meetings with these organizations had been the value and quality of data that these groups had assembled on states’ compliance with the Helsinki Act. Because of this, the Congressional delegation expressed their strong desire to see contact between the Helsinki Commission and these types of organizations continue after the conclusion of the Study Mission. They believed that their input was likely to “be helpful to the overall Western consultative process, before and after Belgrade.” The report recommended that U.S. legislators “maintain close liaison with the most active of these special interest organizations so that their particular expertise and points of view on Helsinki issues [could] be made a helpful ingredient in the continuing official and public review of the utility of the Final Act.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

Interestingly, the report described these institutions and their work as existing “outside the immediate CSCE framework,” suggesting the degree to which Commission members still considered the Helsinki process at this point in time from the paradigmatic viewpoint of traditional international relations, where the pressure upon a state to abide by its international covenants overwhelmingly originated from the power and authority of its fellow state governments. In truth, it would be some time before the Commission would fully come to understand the place of the individual citizen with respect to the Helsinki
Agreement—not just insofar as how the protection of the individual served as a constituent element of participating states' responsibility to the Final Act, but also the role that individual private citizens had and should be invited to play in contributing to the overall strength and success of the agreement. Crucially though, this Study Mission's report serves as early evidence of the fact that governmental organizations like the U.S. Helsinki Commission were gradually becoming sensitized to seeing the Final Act of the CSCE as a mechanism by which previously marginalized interest holders were able to more effectively insert themselves into the Helsinki arbitration process.

Based on its findings, the Study Mission concluded its report with a list of fifteen specific recommendations for the U.S. Helsinki Commission and the rest of the U.S. government in preparation for the Belgrade meeting, with the aim of strengthening the overall impact of the CSCE process. Of the fifteen, five of these recommendations dealt specifically with increasing cooperation between the U.S. government and private individuals or organizations. This fact demonstrates that members of the Commission recognized as early as 1976 the valuable role that public opinion could potentially play in the CSCE review process. Engaging individual citizens from the private sector both at home and abroad would help to expand the mechanisms for implementation and monitoring in ways that far surpassed the capabilities of governments acting without such support. Most importantly, robust public pressure would provide Western governments with the authority to be more resolute in their dealings with countries like the Soviet Union on the provisions protecting greater individual freedoms, which they most wanted to see implemented through the Helsinki framework. And yet, while it is clear that the value of nongovernmental involvement was evident to many of these officials even from the early stages of the Helsinki process, the specific approach that policymakers sought to take at this time seemed to miss the mark when it came to mobilizing public opinion en masse.

\[24\] Ibid. In addition to this report, there are a multitude of different documents housed within the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe archives that demonstrate the Commission's efforts to engage with private citizens and help improve public opinion toward the Helsinki process. Transcripts of Commission hearings are particularly demonstrative of this. As an example, see Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Hearings before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe on Implementation of the Helsinki Accords," vol. III, Information Flow, and Cultural and Educational Exchanges, 17 May 1977, accessed 6 August 2018, https://www.csce.gov/international-impact/events/implementation-helsinki-accords-vol-iii-information-flow-and-cultural.
Although the U.S. Helsinki Commission actively encouraged the American
government’s closer association and involvement with nongovernmental organizations
advocating for states’ faithful adherence to the terms of the Helsinki Final Act, they most
often did so at this time through their collaboration with specific special interest groups
whose defense of the Final Act was generally circumscribed by the limited objectives
defined by that group’s particular interests. This approach to nongovernmental
involvement reflected a certain doctrinal way of thinking in Washington, which had long
historical precedence in the government’s past involvement with NGOs promoting U.S.
policymaking with respect to human rights issues. From the support provided by Jewish-
American organizations for the establishment of the United Nations Commission on Human
Rights and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the aftermath of
the Holocaust, to the solidarity of African-American groups in support of the campaign to
end apartheid in South Africa, it was understood in Washington that these special interest
groups could be relied upon to generate substantial support within their respective
communities for both politicians and policies that aligned with their interests.25

In the twelve months between the establishment of the Helsinki Commission and
the start of preparatory agenda-setting talks at Belgrade, the Commission heard testimony
from such groups as the Polish-American Congress, the American-Romanian Committee on
Family Reunion, the Helsinki Guarantees for Ukraine Committee, the Union of Councils for
Soviet Jews, the Czechoslovak National Council of America, and the U.S.-USSR Trade
Council. These were just a small number of the special interests groups with whom the
Commission sought to engage.26 Similarly, the private organizations that the 1976
Congressional Study Mission to Europe met with included representatives from the
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, the Jewish Agency for Israel, the World Federation of Free

25 For more on NGO’s promotion of specific human rights issues within U.S. policy prior to the 1970s, see
William Korey, NGOs and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “A Curious Grapevine” (New York:
Palgrave, 1998); Welch Jr. ed., NGOs and Human Rights: Promise and Performance; Jan Eckel, “The
International League for the Rights of Man, Amnesty International, and the Changing Fate of Human Rights
Activism from the 1940s through the 1970s,” Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights,
Humanitarianism, and Development 4, no. 2 (2013): 183–214; Zachary Steven Ramirez, International Human
Rights Activism in the United States during the Cold War, (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley,
2013); Bradley, The World Reimagined.
26 Dante Fascell, “The Helsinki Accord: A Case Study,” The Annals of the American Academy of Political and
Social Science 442 (1979): 69–76.
Latvians, the World Council of Churches, the Institute of Jewish Affairs, as well as a number of individuals from ethnic and national émigré communities.\footnote{27} What stands out about the interests of these particular nongovernmental organizations is the relatively limited resonance that those groups’ appeals were likely to have on American society at large. That is not to say that these groups’ efforts were in any way insignificant, or that the American people were not sympathetic to their cause, only that special interest groups tended to, by definition, focus their efforts on achieving specific goals, which pertained to their community’s immediate interests—a particular set of deliverables with an often limited focus. These organizations based their efforts upon a desire to achieve the restoration of dignity or rights for a particular group, rather than the practical defense of values that undergirded Western society at large. Journalists advocated for fewer restrictions on journalism; émigrés advocated for freer movement of people; religious organizations advocated for greater freedom of belief and freedom from religious persecution. Furthermore, the strategies employed by these groups to achieve such ends overwhelmingly tended to involve lobbying U.S. policymakers, and rarely sought to enlist the support of large swaths of the American people.\footnote{28}

By the mid-to-late 1970s, however, nongovernmental organizations began arriving on the scene in pursuit of a much more holistic mandate, striving to assume a place within American society as legitimate agents of general reform with respect to international human rights issues more broadly. A confluence of different factors contributed to this shift in the strategies and scope of many of these organizations. The questionable morality and conduct of the Nixon administration, culminating in the public exposure of the Watergate scandal and Nixon’s own resignation, as well as the American military’s ignominious withdrawal from Vietnam all helped to produce an unprecedented degree of support for Congressional oversight of American foreign policy at this time, which provided

opportunities for previously underrepresented actors to better exert their influence in this field. Of course, the signing of the Helsinki Final Act itself was also significant, as it explicitly called upon individual citizens to “know and act upon” their rights in the context of the multilateral agreements and provided an international framework through which to do so. Finally, action taken by individuals in positions of power at this time also helped to facilitate an environment in which concern for the violation of certain rights could be more clearly addressed and widely publicized throughout American society.

Perhaps the most prominent individual effort that helped to elevate concern for human rights during this period was that of President Jimmy Carter’s. His decision to make human rights an American foreign policy priority and a centerpiece of his administration not only helped to mobilize the resources of the American government to more effectively address such issues, but also substantially raised public awareness by capturing the attention of the American people and the media concerning human rights in a way that little else at this time could. Other leaders on issues of human rights in Congress—individuals such as Fenwick, Clifford Case (who co-sponsored Fenwick’s proposed bill for the creation of the Helsinki Commission), and Dante Fascell (the Commission’s first chairman and a tireless supporter of human rights)—also did much to bring these issues to the forefront of political discourse in the mid-to-late 1970s.

But perhaps the individual who had the most lasting impact on Americans’ commitment to the Helsinki process and the role that nongovernmental organizations came to fulfill within it was the man who President Carter chose to lead the U.S. delegation at the first CSCE follow-up negotiations in Belgrade, Arthur J. Goldberg. As a former Secretary of Labor in the Kennedy administration, and Supreme Court Justice and

29 See Keys, Reclaiming American Virtue, particularly chapter 8.
30 Of course, the human rights policies that would come to define Carter’s presidency were themselves the product of exhaustive work by innumerable policy advisers and analysts whose outlooks were themselves informed by a multitude of different social, cultural and political factors. Yet, the exceptional authority of the presidency, with the final decision to pursue or abandon any particular course of action ultimately resting upon the will of a single individual is sufficient in this instance to be acknowledged. For more on the complex history of Carter’s human rights policy and its implications for U.S.–Soviet relations, see David C. Engerman, Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America’s Soviet Experts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); T.M. Nichols, “Carter and the Soviets: The Origins of the U.S. Return to a Strategy of Confrontation,” Diplomacy & Statecraft 13, no. 2 (2002): 21–42; Christian Philip Peterson, “The Carter Administration and the Promotion of Human Rights in the Soviet Union, 1977-1981,” Diplomatic History 38, no. 3 (2014): 628–56; Renouard, Human Rights in American Foreign Policy; Sargent, A Superpower Transformed.
Ambassador to the UN under President Johnson, Goldberg’s credentials were of the highest order, and his appointment to lead the American delegation was an unambiguous sign of the new administration’s commitment to the CSCE. His conduct both at the Belgrade meeting and back home in Washington proved to be instrumental in changing the way that American policymakers viewed the CSCE, and ushered in a new way of thinking about nongovernmental participation in the Helsinki process.

ARTHUR J. GOLDBERG AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF NONGOVERNMENTAL INFLUENCE IN THE HELSINKI PROCESS

Goldberg’s record of support for the defense of international human rights had significant precedence throughout his long career in public service. As a staunch opponent of America’s escalating involvement in Vietnam, Goldberg had stepped down from the Supreme Court in 1965 to accept the position of U.S. Ambassador to the UN, with the expectation that he could use the office to help broker some sort of peaceful resolution to the conflict. According to biographer David L. Stebenne, Goldberg agreed to accept Johnson’s nomination only after he was given assurances by the president that the White House also favored a negotiated end to the fighting, and that, as UN Ambassador, it would be one of Goldberg’s primarily responsibilities to work toward such an end.

While this appears to be precisely the impression the Johnson had hoped to cultivate, the nomination of Goldberg seems to have been primarily motivated by the president’s need to deflect the criticism of those in his party who opposed increased American involvement in Vietnam, and who would consider the selection of somebody of Goldberg’s status to be a sincere gesture of the administration’s willingness to pursue a peaceful resolution. The White House also used Goldberg’s appointment to help manage the expectations of the public, as his nomination to the UN was announced just prior to Johnson’s decision to increase the American military’s presence in South Vietnam from 31


75,000 to 125,000 troops. The strategy paid off, as the reporting of these events in the American press stressed their connection. In light of Goldberg’s appointment, Johnson’s escalation of the war effort was billed as an act of reluctant restraint and calculated statecraft, whose goal was ultimately to achieve a peaceful resolution. In actuality, unbeknownst to the public, Johnson had approved an increase of up to 200,000 troops in addition to a major increase in military spending, before Goldberg had even agreed to accept the position.\(^3\)

The ideological differences that existed between Johnson and Goldberg continued throughout the latter’s time as Ambassador. Yet Goldberg was not to be deterred from pursuing an approach at the UN that aligned with his beliefs. While serving as Ambassador, Goldberg had played an important part in the final negotiations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)—two multilateral treaties adopted by the General Assembly in December 1966 that called upon states to observe and protect various internationally recognized rights. On the eve of the two Covenants’ adoption, Goldberg wrote to President Johnson, strongly advocating for their immediate ratification, arguing that such a move would provide the United States with an opportunity of “immense value” to “set and uphold [new] international standards” built around the defense of human rights. An American foreign policy approach that embraced concern for human rights, Goldberg said, would “represent a new, liberal departure in our international relations” and would serve as a “logical component” to the progress made domestically through the recent passage of civil rights legislation. This bold new direction, Goldberg believed, would “allow [the United States] to answer Soviet criticism in a psychologically important area of international cooperation.”\(^4\)

Goldberg argued that the current US approach forfeited much of what he described as the “international advantage” that could be gained from a more unambiguous position


on human rights, and suggested that it was time the United States stepped into a leadership role concerning these issues.\textsuperscript{35} His conduct as Ambassador to the UN further demonstrated the extent of his belief in the efficacy of such a strategy. In his statements to the General Assembly, he frequently voiced support for a more unambiguous American position concerning human rights issues, even going so far in March 1968 as to publically admonish Soviet representatives for their government’s persecution of dissident authors. Goldberg’s indictment of the Soviet government within the forum of the UN broke decisively with the prevailing American policy with respect to issues of human rights and their relations with the Soviet Union. His denunciation was one of the earliest occurrences of a Western government using an international platform to publically challenge the Soviet government on the treatment of its own citizens—an issue which had long been regarded within the realm of international relations as strictly an internal affair, and as such, the purview of that government alone.\textsuperscript{36} These bold and assertive tactics would come to define Goldberg’s approach to human rights within the context of the Belgrade follow up meeting—an approach that would set him apart from European allies and certain colleagues in the State Department for his willingness to directly confront the Soviets and engage with them on matters of cultural cooperation.

Goldberg saw the aggressive pursuit of human rights on the international stage as a means by which to further other U.S. policy aims, and better situate the United States to engage with its geopolitical rivals on vital international issues from a position of strength. But these documents also testify to the important contributive role that Goldberg felt should be played by nongovernmental organizations and the public when executing such a strategy. In Goldberg’s 1966 letter to the president, the future Ambassador-at-large to the Belgrade conference suggested to Johnson additional steps that could be taken, which might lend assistance to the administration when pushing for the ratification of the two international human rights covenants. These measures involved enlisting the help of private organizations to rally public support for this administrative action.\textsuperscript{37}

As Goldberg saw it, an effective American approach to international human rights

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} “Letter from Goldberg to Johnson,” \textit{FRUS}. 
issues required consistent, principled policy across all areas of government backed by strong popular support. Citing the recent creation of the Ad-Hoc Committee on Human Rights and Genocide Treaties—an advocacy group made up of more than fifty prominent American NGOs whose goal was to lobby Senatorial support for President Kennedy’s proposed conventions on genocide, slavery, forced labor, and the rights of women—Goldberg stressed to Johnson the role that he believed could similarly be played by U.S.-based nongovernmental organizations in this instance. Goldberg emphasized to the president that there was an important part to be played by nongovernmental actors in helping to “contribute to understanding in the Senate and the American public of the importance of US ratification of human rights conventions.”

Despite these efforts, Goldberg’s vision for a more unequivocal U.S. approach towards human rights would not be realized during his time as UN Ambassador. Among other considerations, the United States’ intensifying involvement in the Vietnam War precluded such a high-minded position on international human rights issues at this time, to say nothing of the challenges of winning widespread domestic support for American foreign policy in the late 1960s. But within the decade, changes to the international and domestic political landscape alluded to earlier presented the Ambassador with an opportunity to revisit these ideas. His appointment to head the U.S. delegation at the first CSCE follow up conference in Belgrade gave Goldberg the chance to once again pursue his vision for a more outspoken American human rights policy with some possibility of success.

**THE BELGRADE CSCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

Under Goldberg’s leadership, the U.S. delegation at the Belgrade conference decisively broke with accepted notion that the West should not pressure the Soviets too

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39 For an overview of some of the challenges that Goldberg faced when seeking to promote certain policy recommendations as UN Ambassador, see Robert H. Estabrook, “Goldberg Said to Delay Quitting,” *Washington Post*, 1 April 1968; “Goldberg Quits,” *Chicago Tribune*, 26 April 1968; Max Frankel, “Chilly Tone Marked Exchanges between Johnson and Goldberg,” *New York Times*, 29 April 1968. Goldberg’s personal views—and the degree to which they diverge from official U.S. policy—are further articulated in an eight-part series written by the former Ambassador and published in the *South China Morning Post* from 7 to 17 September 1968.
directly on matters of human rights for fear of jeopardizing possible progress on other aspects of détente. Instead, using tactics similar to those employed by Goldberg at the UN in 1968, the United States delegation began a concerted effort to publically name and shame Soviet bloc countries for their failure to comply with the humanitarian provisions of the Helsinki agreements up to this point. From the outset of the Belgrade negotiations, the U.S. delegation made no secret of their intention to demand greater adherence to the humanitarian articles contained within the Final Act. Representatives from Washington repeatedly stressed the importance of the Third Basket of the agreement pertaining to cooperation in humanitarian fields and Principle VII of the Declaration of Principles, which guaranteed respect for human rights and the fundamental freedoms of individual citizens within the participating countries.40

Goldberg’s conduct as head of the U.S. delegation at Belgrade was very much in keeping with his long-held personal belief in the value of a strong U.S. position on human rights. His actions at the CSCE follow up meeting significantly helped to encourage new ways of thinking among the American people concerning the utility of the Helsinki process and its place in international affairs. But while his behavior at Belgrade may have set an important precedent for future multilateral negotiations, the immediate effects of this strategy were largely stymied by intransigent allies and the prioritization by many at the meeting of questions of military security over matters of cultural cooperation. When the conference came to a close in March 1978, no definitive concluding document could be drafted under the rules of consensus, and little had been resolved, except for a commitment by the signatory states to meet again in Madrid in 1980.41

Immediately following the conclusion of the Belgrade conference, Goldberg appeared before the U.S. Congressional Helsinki Commission to give testimony on the progress of Helsinki implementation in the almost three-year period since the signing of Final Act, and to summarize what he considered to be the achievements of the recently

41 For more on the development and execution of American policy at the Belgrade conference, see Snyder, Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War, particularly chapter 4; Thomas, The Helsinki Effect, particularly chapter 4; Korey, The Promises We Keep, particularly chapters 4 and 5.
concluded Belgrade meeting. In his testimony, Goldberg rebutted the popular perception that Belgrade had accomplished little, and decried the poor coverage in the American press concerning the achievements of the conference. According to the Ambassador, one of the greatest accomplishments of the Belgrade meeting was that it demonstrated to Western observers a fact that he had long believed: that the CSCE process was a gradual one. “We’re not going to change habits, traditions—particularly in the East—overnight,” Goldberg said. Rather, he insisted that Americans must use the forum of the CSCE to engage the Soviets with patience and determination, and systematically build upon the small achievements that were made possible through the Helsinki framework to, as he put it, “let a little sunlight in,” in the hopes that greater openness and less repression would begin to characterize the Soviet’s behavior in time.  

When seen from this perspective, Goldberg explained to the Commission, the Belgrade conference represented an undeniable success, since the actions of the Western delegations confirmed in no uncertain terms that the defense of human rights and fundamental freedoms now existed as an appropriate subject of international concern within the Helsinki process. “It cannot be said any longer, despite objections from some of the Eastern bloc, that matters such as this are not the legitimate subject of international inquiry, investigation, [and] accounting.” Furthermore, Goldberg believed that by recognizing individual rights in this way, the Helsinki process had revealed itself as a resilient international framework through which the role of the individual in contributing to global peace and security was finally recognized. He defended the American delegation’s decision to cite specific cases of human rights abuse and the noncompliance of individual states, since, as he saw it, the Final Act concerned not only governments, but people as well: “The Final Act not only is an act which relates to governments,” Goldberg said, “it relates to people, [and] the role of the individual in contributing to peace and security. Governments alone cannot make peace. Peace, in large part, is a matter of human rights.”

Goldberg stressed in his testimony before the Helsinki Commission that there was still much work that needed to be done—not least of all among private individuals residing in the West. In reference to the efforts of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group and other

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Eastern European citizens organizations that were created to monitor their governments’ compliance with the Final Act, Goldberg puzzled over the absence of a similar movement within the United States. “It’s a great anomaly to me that while in the Soviet Union, in Czechoslovakia, in Poland under conditions of repression, private individuals have had the courage to organize private groups, [and yet] in our country individuals have not organized a monitoring group.”

In a U.S.-based Helsinki monitoring group, Goldberg saw the fulfillment of the important role that nongovernmental agency was to play in the greater human rights strategy that he first proposed in 1966. Conforming to his previous statements on the utility of nongovernmental organizations, Goldberg expressed his belief that, through close cooperation with the Commission, a U.S.-based Helsinki monitoring group could supplement Congress’ efforts to bring attention to states’ Helsinki commitments by legitimizing actions taken to better ensure such compliance with the force of a popular movement. Furthermore, as a group of private citizens expressing their commitment to the observation of humanitarian provisions of the Helsinki Accords, this organization would be able to act in ways that governmental bodies could not, since they would not be subject to the same inevitable accusations of disingenuous motivation or partisan political opportunism.

THE ORIGINS OF A U.S. HELSINKI GROUP

Because the Helsinki Final Act explicitly called upon individual citizens to “know and act upon” their rights, and because the Carter administration was determined to pursue a much more publically facing diplomatic strategy with respect to the CSCE process, the U.S. State Department had arranged several meetings prior to and during the Belgrade Conference between members of the U.S. delegation and representatives from a variety of different nongovernmental organizations. The purpose of these meetings was to give these organizations the opportunity to express their concerns and hopes for the upcoming negotiations, to provide the delegation with access to information that these groups had compiled on various human rights issues, and to stimulate private initiatives in support of

44 Ibid.
greater Helsinki implementation. Documents show that Arthur Goldberg had personally attended several such meetings, and was supportive of their potential to contribute meaningfully to the delegation’s work.45

Similar to those private citizens’ groups that were invited to testify before the Helsinki Commission prior to the Belgrade meeting, or the listening sessions conducted by the Study Mission to Europe, the nongovernmental organizations that had participated in these consultations with Goldberg and the U.S. delegation were overwhelmingly comprised of various special interests groups representing particular ethnic, national or religious communities, which had their own vested interest in seeing greater Helsinki implementation in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. One such meeting, held a month before the opening of the Belgrade Conference in October 1977, was attended by a woman in her mid-forties named Jeri Laber—a freelance writer and staff member of the Association of American Publishers (AAP). As a part-time writer and mother of three, Laber had led an otherwise unassuming life before taking up the fight for human rights in the mid-1970s, after reading an article which appeared in the New Republic detailing the inhumane imprisonment of opponents to the Greek military junta. At the time of the State Department consultations, Laber was serving as the representative of a New York-based NGO known as the Fund for Free Expression—an advocacy group organized by American publishers and writers, which sought to bring greater visibility to the plight of authors and dissidents in the East whose ability to write and publish freely was being infringed upon by their government.46

According to Laber’s memoirs, at this meeting Ambassador Goldberg took a special interest in the activities of the Fund for Free Expression precisely because it was one of the only organizations in attendance that day whose activities were not limited to the concerns of any one particular group, but rather based its efforts around the defense of a fundamental principle that was important to the rights of people everywhere. The freedom of expression was not only a pertinent matter of Helsinki implementation, but was also a core value that was central to the Western identity, and was an issue that could be expected

45 See Arthur Goldberg’s Right of Reply to the Soviet Delegation, 11 November 1977, in “U.S. Statements at the Belgrade CSCE Meeting.”
to resonate among the American people. After the two discussed at some length the
challenges facing freedom of expression in Soviet bloc countries, Goldberg asked Laber to
prepare a briefing paper on some of the challenges free expression faced in Helsinki
signatory states. Her report emphasized the effects that the denial of free expression had
on individual citizens, and focused particularly on the situation facing dissidents like Yuri
Orlov—the founder of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group—whose efforts to establish and
operate a nongovernmental Helsinki monitoring organization in Moscow had led to his
persecution by Soviet authorities. Orlov’s plight was among those that Goldberg later
addressed the following month at the plenary discussions at Belgrade, as part of his
strategy of publicly naming and shaming state governments through the use of specific
effects of repression. Such a strategy fundamentally relied upon detailed information
that groups like the Fund for Free Expression could provide.

The Fund for Free Expression had only been in existence for several months by the
time Jeri Laber was invited to meet with Ambassador Goldberg and the other members of
the U.S. delegation to Belgrade in Washington. It operated out of just a single repurposed
room in a New York City office building. And yet, by the time of this meeting, the Fund had
already achieved a reputation as a reliable and trustworthy source of information
concerning problems of free expression in many parts of the world. This is because the
organization had its roots in a high profile network of activists who were deeply involved
in the New York publishing world. The board of the Fund for Free Expression included the
heads of several prominent publishing houses and well-known American writers. Its
founder, Robert L. Bernstein, was himself the CEO of Random House, an American book
publisher that, together with its subsidiaries, was responsible for the Western distribution
of many progressive Soviet and dissident authors.

Bernstein had long been an ardent supporter of human rights, and was extremely
active throughout his career in advocating for greater American governmental and private
support for those who had been oppressed for their political beliefs. On 18 November
1975, less than three months after the Final Act was signed, Bernstein was called to testify

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47 Laber, The Courage of Strangers, 97.
48 Ibid; Bernstein, Speaking Freely, 147-48.
49 The broad extent of Bernstein’s involvement with human rights advocacy is perhaps best summarized in
his 2016 memoir Speaking Freely.
before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Investigations, concerning the freedom to write and publish internationally. As a member of the publishing community with many substantive business dealings in the USSR, Bernstein recounted the challenges that he and others in his field so often encountered when dealing with the Soviet government—particularly when it came to the publishing of, and communication with, dissident authors.

At the hearing, Bernstein spoke at length about specific cases of repression that these dissidents and their families faced as a result of their decision to speak out against what they saw as injustice within their own society. In telling these stories, Bernstein hoped to illustrate to the members of Congress the significant challenges the Soviet government posed to the free expression of their people, and the significant way in which he felt that American publishers were, to an increasing degree, “influenced by and involved with whom—and what—we are publishing.”

By distributing these authors’ works, Bernstein believed that the Western publishers of Soviet dissidents had become every bit as involved in the struggle between these citizens and their government as the writers themselves—an involvement that extended to those in the West who went on to then read those works. “You can see how being a publisher can lead to involvement in what the Soviet Union and perhaps even our own State Department might call an ‘internal affair,’” Bernstein testified. “Yet, is a matter like this really an ‘internal affair;’ or does such oppression inevitably influence the mind and life of every person who comes in contact with it?”

Throughout his testimony, the Random House CEO suggested that the U.S. government’s generally dismissive attitude toward matters of free expression and other basic rights up to this point was misguided, since “respect for human rights was so deeply ingrained in the American character.” But beyond the important place that free expression had as a constituent element of the American identity, Bernstein stressed the direct and inextricable link that he believe existed between human rights and the preservation of peace and security throughout the world. At several points in his remarks,

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50 Robert L. Bernstein, "Remarks before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations Hearing on International Freedom to Write and Publish," 18 November 1975, Andrei Sakharov Papers, MS Russ 79, folder S.II.2.1 1.02.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
he provided members of the committee with numerous detailed examples of Soviet repression, and asked that if the Communist government demonstrated this degree of disrespect for their own laws as well as what he called the “international morality” of human rights norms—not least of which, the recently signed Helsinki Accords—then what reason was there to believe that they would regard subjects like disarmament with any greater commitment?53

Bernstein’s career at Random House began in 1956. After ten years in sales, he took over as president and CEO from Random House’s co-founder, Bennett Cerf. Cerf, together with his partner Donald Klopfer, ran Random House as an open and inclusive environment, both for the company’s staff and the authors they signed. As Bernstein described in a 2016 interview, it was not uncommon for Cerf and Klopfer to form personal relationships with many of their house’s authors, making them feel that Random House was “not only their publisher, but a part of their life.”54 In addition to the care that these men showed for their employees and authors, they were also outspoken defenders of the right to free expression, challenging McCarthyism in the 1950s, and even bringing a lawsuit against the U.S. government for its censorship of James Joyce’s Ulysses.55 Bernstein credited both men as having had a formative influence on his own approach to the business, and after taking over as president at the beginning of 1966, he worked hard to preserve the founders’ humanistic spirit through a number of mergers and acquisitions that transformed Random House into one of the largest and most influential publishing houses in the United States. As a publisher, Bernstein considered it one of his primary responsibilities to protect the ability of authors to bring forth and present their ideas in an open forum, and to as large an audience as possible. “Only through the free exchange of ideas,” Bernstein once remarked, can people “hope to better understand each other and build for our future.”56

53 Ibid.
Robert Bernstein was first confronted by the situation facing Soviet writers after he travelled to Moscow in 1970 as part of a delegation representing the Association of American Publishers. The delegation’s mission was to establish better commercial relations with the Soviet publishing industry and learn more about their ways of doing business, while also advocating for the Soviet’s ratification of the Universal Copyright Convention, which would ensure greater international copyright protection. Upon his return from the Soviet Union, Bernstein began to follow the struggle of Soviet dissident thinkers more closely, and learn more about the challenges they faced. He recognized that one obvious thing Random House could do right away to assist these writers was to publish their works.57

As the head of a major New York publishing corporation, Bernstein’s unique advantage in the field of human rights promotion lay in his access to well-known authors, publishers, and journalists, as well as high-ranking members of public service. As a pillar of American society, his voice carried substantial weight, and commanded the kind of attention that Soviet dissidents so badly needed. As an example of the kind of access that Bernstein enjoyed by virtue of his position at Random House, by the early 1970s, he had developed a personal relationship with Henry Kissinger, whom Bernstein remembers as simply having contacted him one day “out of the blue.”58 The two maintained regular contact over the years—a relationship that gave Bernstein a unique channel through which he could petition the Nixon administration at a personal level on behalf of Soviet dissidents and their fight for free expression.59

In a telephone conversation with Kissinger in July 1973, Bernstein advanced his human rights agenda by bringing to the attention of the National Security Advisor the recent three-year extension of the dissident Andrei Amalrik’s prison sentence, just prior to the conclusion of his 1970 conviction for slander against the Soviet state. Kissinger assured Bernstein that the matter would be raised with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin later that day, but asked Bernstein to make no mention of the intervention on Amalrik’s behalf.

57 Ibid., 118; 123; 128.
58 Ibid., 115.
59 Such a backchannel was perhaps ultimately of limited use to Bernstein, as Nixon and Kissinger’s views toward pressuring the Soviets on their human rights record were, for the most part, obstinately dismissive. See Barbara J. Keys, “Nixon/Kissinger and Brezhnev,” Diplomatic History 42, no. 4 (2018): 548–51.
“[M]y experience has been that I’m more effective,” Kissinger said, “by not making a public issue of it. That doesn’t mean you couldn’t make an issue of it.”60 The suggestion that Bernstein use his position as an influential private citizen to raise awareness of these kinds of issues seems to demonstrate that even a consummate realist such as Henry Kissinger saw the benefit of well-placed public pressure on the Soviet government in helping to further certain American objectives. “It is appropriate and indeed helpful,” Kissinger told Bernstein “to have private groups raise hell.”61

The extent to which Kissinger was sincere on this point is difficult to qualify. What is clear, however, is that shortly after their conversation, Bernstein began investing much more of his time and energy into his human rights work. In the spring of 1973, Bernstein travelled once again to Moscow as part of an AAP delegation, this time to finalize negotiations concerning the Soviet’s ascension to the Universal Copyright Convention, which took place on 27 May. Upon his return to the United States, Bernstein was struck by how unaware average citizens seemed to be concerning the ongoing repression of dissidents inside the Soviet Union, and how little press coverage these events received in American newspapers. Bernstein considered this to be highly unfortunate since, after having gained a better understanding of the nature of the leadership within the Soviet publishing industry, he recognized that one form of outside influence that was likely to be effective in spurring reform would be to better publicize the Soviet’s repressive practices.62

Yet, the problem as he saw it was that, apart from a few notable exceptions, very few people in the United States had ever heard of many of these Soviet dissidents or even knew of their struggles.63 So in order to bring greater visibility to the dissident cause, Bernstein

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61 Ibid.
62 Bernstein, Speaking Freely, 131.
63 These exceptions included figures such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, whose meteoric rise as a controversial Thaw era Russian novelist culminated with the 1973 foreign publication of his novel The Gulag Archipelago, which earned him superstar status in the West and his banishment from Soviet Russia a year later, and Andrei Sakharov, the renowned nuclear physicist and father of the Soviet hydrogen bomb, whose criticism of the Soviet government after the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia led him to become one of the most outspoken proponents of the Soviet human rights movement. For more on these and other notable dissidents
took action, enlisting the help of several prominent American authors and publishers to draft letters calling public attention to cases of individual repression, such as those of Andrei Amalrik, or Vladimir Bukovsky—members of the new generation of Soviet dissidents whose fearlessness in challenging the regime had resulted in their habitual incarceration from a young age. Originally known as the Soviet-American Publishing Committee, the group’s membership included the well-known authors John Hersey, Arthur Miller, and Harrison Salisbury, as well as the heads of several prominent American publishers, including William Jovanovich of Harcourt, Brace; Brad Wiley of John Wiley & Sons; and Winthrop Knowlton of Harper and Row.64

By 1975, Bernstein had succeeded in petitioning the AAP to create an organization whose goal it would be to promote the protection and expansion of freedom of written communication internationally. The group became known as the International Freedom to Publish Committee, with Bernstein serving as its appointed chair. The legitimacy lent to the organization by its formal connection with the Association of American Publishers had a significant impact on the leadership of the Soviet publishing industry, which regarded the official seal of the AAP with great importance. According to a white paper released by the Association, the goals of the International Freedom to Publish Committee were to lobby members of Congress and the U.S. government—in addition to foreign governmental officials—on issues concerning international free expression, and on behalf of persecuted writers and publishers. The Committee also endeavored to send fact-finding missions, issue reports, as well as organize exhibits to promote freedom of expression in foreign countries where that right was threatened.65

Bernstein described the group as a follow on to the work that he and others had undertaken as part of the Soviet-American Publishing Committee, only now with an

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64 The enlistment of prominent members of the American publishing industry and literary community would be a strategy employed countless times in later years by Helsinki Watch, when working to bring greater public attention to individual Soviet citizens’ struggle for their human rights. In fact, many of the same authors and publishers involved in the letter writing campaign in 1973 would go on to serve as influential members of the Helsinki Watch board. *Ibid.*, 132–33.

enlarged geographic scope. Focusing primarily on government censorship of authors and publishers, the International Freedom to Publish Committee employed the same strategies that Bernstein had previously used to advocate for the rights of Amalrik and Bukovsky—namely a publicity campaign of letter writing targeting government officials and American newspaper outlets. However, it wasn’t long before the activities of this group came into conflict with the leadership of the AAP, which, since Moscow’s ascension to the Universal Copyright Convention, had been working with the Soviet All-Union Copyright Agency (VAAP) to develop the USSR as a market for American educational publications, and which had little patience for moralistic sermonizing about human rights. This continual reticence on the part of the AAP led Bernstein to step down from the International Freedom to Publish Committee in early 1977, but his determination to continue to defend the rights of Soviet dissident authors persisted unabated.66

Although Bernstein had no experience managing a nonprofit organization, and little idea of how to finance or operate one, he created the Fund for Free Expression several months after stepping down from the International Freedom to Publish Committee, so that, in his words, he could better “call attention to writers and dissidents in the Eastern bloc and to press for their rights.” Freed from the conflicting interests of the AAP, Bernstein and those in his organization were now able to pursue the fight for human rights as best as they saw fit. Like the Committee, the membership of the Fund was made up almost entirely of prominent American publishers and authors, whose stature the Fund relied upon to elevate their human rights efforts in the public eye. The contacts and influence that Bernstein and the other members enjoyed by virtue of their professional accomplishments provided the Fund for Free Expression with the ability to pursue their particular human rights agenda in ways that other nongovernmental groups of the time could not.67

Over time, it was these types of personal contacts that would help to provide important access to funding and would even open doors for the expansion of Bernstein’s human rights work. By the mid-1970s, another personal relationship—this time with the former President of CBS, Fred Friendly—led Bernstein to make the acquaintance of Ford Foundation President McGeorge Bundy during a chance meeting at the Foundation’s offices

66 Bernstein, Speaking Freely, 142; 145–46.
67 Ibid., 148.
in New York City. Bundy, a former National Security Adviser to two U.S. presidents, is perhaps best remembered for the role he played in American foreign policymaking during the Vietnam War. But as president of the Ford Foundation from 1966 to 1979, Bundy was instrumental in advancing the cause of international human rights through the Ford Foundation’s investment in nongovernmental organizations. Upon getting to know Bernstein, Bundy was impressed by the New York publisher’s record of human rights activism up to that point, and in following years, saw fit to approve several Foundation grants to finance his Fund for Free Expression.68

When Arthur Goldberg returned from the Belgrade meeting, he too was dismayed by the American public’s negative perception of the Helsinki Agreements, and the poor media coverage that his delegation’s efforts had received at the first follow up conference. Convinced of the utility of this mission, the former Ambassador and Supreme Court Justice took up the effort to help establish a nongovernmental organization that could help to combat such a perception, and assist in future efforts of the U.S. government when pursuing these humanitarian issues on the international stage. In the spring of 1978, Goldberg came to Bundy—who knew from their time together serving in the Kennedy administration—with the proposal to create such an organization. When contemplating the possibility of an organization that could help generate greater public support for citizens of Soviet and Eastern European states who called upon their governments to more fully comply with their Helsinki commitments, Bundy suggested Robert Bernstein and his Fund for Free Expression for the job. According to historian William Korey, it was precisely Bernstein’s extensive personal network of influence and access that made his organization such an appealing choice for Bundy and later Goldberg, when considering the publisher to spearhead the formation of a U.S. Helsinki monitoring group. On 5 April 1978, McGeorge Bundy and Arthur Goldberg met with Bernstein and Jeri Laber to discuss the possibility of creating a U.S. Helsinki monitoring organization.69


69 Bernstein, Speaking Freely, 149; Korey, Taking on the World’s Repressive Regimes, 97–100.
CONCLUSIONS

The U.S. approach toward participation in the CSCE had changed dramatically in the three years between the signing of the Final Act and the proposed creation of a private citizens' Helsinki monitoring body. These changes coincided with larger shifts in American attitudes toward the place of human rights in U.S. foreign relations generally. The difference in Executive and Congressional support for these issues during both the Ford and Carter administrations is perhaps the clearest indicator of such a shift. But there were also other, more subtle transformations taking place within American society that had a significant impact on the pace of these changes. Increased economic and cultural exposure between Eastern and Western society had helped to create greater and more frequent private citizen interactions. These increased contacts in cultural areas such as music, the arts, and literature often threw into sharp relief the restrictive control exercised by the Soviet government within these fields—practices which drew significant public attention, and which would inevitably come into conflict with other aspects of the Helsinki agreement.

When discussions were conducted at the Belgrade meeting concerning the role of private institutions, organizations, and individuals within the Helsinki process, it was in this area of cultural cooperation that private participation was most actively encouraged by the Western powers. The U.S. delegation saw direct governmental involvement in the expansion of cultural contacts as limiting and cumbersome, and preferred to allow these developments to be pursued through private initiative. Unlike the Soviet states, Western governments did not intercede to the same extent in order to control and direct cultural development within their society. It was the opinion of Western delegations that private institutions and individuals should have the last word when it came to greater cultural relations, and should determine for themselves the ways in which pursuit of such contact should be carried out.70

When it came to nongovernmental involvement in the promotion of the humanitarian articles of the Final Act, however, the U.S. government saw private

70 See Summary Regarding Cultural Exchange by Guy Coriden, 2 November 1977, in “U.S. Statements at the Belgrade CSCE Meeting.”
organizations playing a much less independent role. Traditionally, NGOs tended to function by voicing their support for or resistance to existing or proposed U.S. policy initiatives, but were rarely if ever the driving force for such policy. They were useful political allies because of their ability to organize key constituencies in support of specific objectives with often limited outcomes. These NGOs served as effective and reliable lobbyists due to their capacity to mobilize segments of the U.S. population that were directly invested in the maintenance of a particular right in question. This lobbying power was overwhelmingly directed toward influencing other U.S. policymakers or the deliberations of international organizations such as the UN, but was seldom primarily geared toward shaping public opinion.

It was Goldberg’s personal and long-held belief of the utility of nongovernmental involvement in the process of U.S. policymaking that provided the chance for one American NGO to assume a much greater public profile when it came to the promotion of the Helsinki agreements. He argued that a private citizens’ group could prove quite useful in helping to legitimize a more outspoken American policy approach to Final Act implementation. The group that was chosen for this purpose was Robert Bernstein’s Fund for Free Expression, which had distinguished itself as an organization willing and capable of challenging the Kremlin on its record of censorship toward dissenting opinion. Goldberg was explicit in his belief that the purpose of such an organization would be to supplement the efforts of existing nongovernmental ethnic, national, and religious organizations, as well as the work undertaken by the Congressional Helsinki Commission to better promote implementation of the Final Act.71

While Bernstein’s group certainly did contribute meaningfully in these respects, its support for human rights reforms did not remain confined to the realm of traditional involvement expected of nongovernmental organizations, but instead sought to sensitize American society at large to these issues. Once created, this group put into practice a much more publicly-facing appeal process—an approach that had served its members’ advocacy efforts well in the past—and began to adopt a more independent posture when publicizing Helsinki human rights violations. This was quite separate and apart from the traditional

channels of official governmental pressure, where such matters were ultimately adjudicated in the course of these states’ bilateral relationships. This strategy signaled a noticeable shift in the attitudes, approaches, and scope of U.S. nongovernmental organizations, and their involvement in the process of U.S. foreign policymaking up to that point. As the next chapter will discuss in more detail, these new approaches relied substantially upon contact across transnational advocacy networks in order to be effective, and helped to contribute to a significant change in U.S. thinking towards humanitarian problems and assistance.
CHAPTER TWO:

THE U.S. HELSINKI WATCH COMMITTEE AND THE FORMULATION OF EARLY ADVOCACY STRATEGIES

This chapter will explore the creation of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee. More specifically, it will investigate the process by which the group emerged as a new kind of nongovernmental human rights organization and developed a uniquely effective strategic approach within the Helsinki process. As an organization, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee was distinct in its mission and its methods, both with respect to existing Helsinki monitoring groups, as well as other Western human rights NGOs. The high profile nature of its elite membership provided the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee and its public pronouncements with a degree of media attention that amplified its credibility and effectiveness as a public relations organization. But in addition to this, the elevated public and professional stature of many the group’s members bestowed upon the Committee an unusual degree of access to transnational networks of communication, which made possible the reliable transmission to the West of documented human rights abuses from the Soviet Union and elsewhere. Contact with Western journalists, U.S. governmental officials, and intellectuals in both the East and the West provided the group with access to information and opportunities that were indispensable to the strategies they pursued.

Such unique access provided the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee with the resources necessary to devise a “case study” method when publicizing instances of Soviet human rights abuses. This approach, which presented emotionally engaging descriptions of the suffering of individuals who had been denied their rights by state governments raised Western public awareness of the dissident cause, and illustrated the very human cost incurred by the circumvention of states’ Helsinki obligations. At the same time, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee presented these findings on human rights abuses in detailed reports to U.S. policymakers and relevant professional organizations, citing specific violations of international agreement, and offering recommendations for corrective action. Backed by the new sense of public urgency that Helsinki Watch’s “case study” campaigns
would generate, U.S. policymakers were free to act more forcefully in their dealings with the offending government.

This kind of support for governmental action was primarily the role that proponents of a private U.S. citizens' Helsinki monitoring organization, such as Arthur Goldberg and members of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, had envisioned the group would play. And while the U.S. Helsinki Watch did provide invaluable public support for a more outspoken American foreign policy position in defense of oppressed Soviet citizens, Soviet non-compliance with the humanitarian articles of the Helsinki Final Act remained but one factor the U.S. government needed to consider when assessing its own conduct in the U.S.-Soviet bilateral relationship. While generating public support for U.S. governmental action was important, the truly invaluable impact of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee's efforts to promote concern for Soviet human rights abuses stemmed from the organization's ability to communicate their message directly to specific groups and individuals within American civil society. This allowed the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee to serve as both a conduit and an amplifier in the West for the activism of those Eastern European and Soviet dissident groups that they championed, helping to establish these dissidents' struggle as a fixture in American culture during the late 1970s and early 80s. By facilitating private sector activism taken up by American scientists, scholars, artists and businessmen, U.S. Helsinki Watch introduced the issue of human rights advocacy directly into areas of cross-cultural East-West exchanges, rather than relying solely on conventional diplomatic pressure.

This chapter focuses on the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee’s activities during the first several months of the group's existence. An analysis of this period will show how the Committee relied upon the personal patronage of many of its most influential members to achieve organizational efficacy. As esteemed members of the medical, scientific, artistic, or business communities, these individuals possessed access to important contacts on both sides of the expanding transnational networks that existed between East and West—networks that were meant to serve as the means by which increased cross-cultural cooperation would take place in the era of détente. This provided U.S. Helsinki Watch with the information and access needed to succeed as a monitor of other states' Helsinki compliance and as a defender of transnational human rights.
This chapter will begin by discussing the formation of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee, and the advantages and challenges that faced the organization as a consequence of their decision to monitor and report upon Helsinki compliance in other countries. Confronted by overwhelmingly poor public opinion of the Helsinki Accords at the time of the NGO’s creation, as well as internal disagreement concerning the group’s central mission and approach, this chapter will show how the founding members of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee sought to recommit their organization to the defense of Helsinki principles within these closed societies. They did this by affirming their direct connection to the greater Helsinki activist network operating in the Soviet Union and across Eastern Europe. The chapter then goes on to investigate actions taken by Helsinki Watch to forge and strengthen those connections in the early months of the group’s existence. These efforts illustrate the extent to which the founders of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee considered their organization to be a part of the larger transnational Helsinki activism network, and how their investment in and reliance upon transnational advocacy came to shape not just their mission, but their strategies as well.

Through a detailed look at one of the U.S. Helsinki Watch’s earliest advocacy campaigns—support for the Soviet writer and refusnik Yuri Druzhnikov—this chapter will illustrate how the group utilized its members’ connections in various fields to at once gather information, publicize issues, and solicit support from the relevant areas of civil society where concerted public pressure could be most effective. These supplications were primarily directed at the various professional circles that had some fundamental connection to the subject of the group’s advocacy efforts, and were initially carried out through a campaign of letter writing. This tactic was a mainstay of earlier Western human rights organizations like Amnesty International, and one that several senior members of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee had experience with through their previous involvement with human rights advocacy. The chapter then briefly presents a cursory history of the role played by international NGOs like Amnesty, which helped forge the path for other organizations to pursue their own human rights agendas. The chapter goes on to reveal the ways that the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee built upon that tradition and distinguished itself from its peers through its more precise focus, addressing patterns of
abuse perpetrated by specific governments that ran contrary to the established normative framework codified through international agreements.¹

Returning to the Druzhnikov campaign, this chapter will then explore the ways that the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee utilized American media—particularly nationally distributed newspapers—to disseminate their message among large swaths of the U.S. population. It was through these channels that the group would reintegrate its public awareness campaign concerning the plight of individual Soviet dissidents with their efforts to build popular support for greater U.S. governmental insistence on Helsinki compliance through their relations with other signatory governments. Thus, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee would operate simultaneously on several unified fronts of human rights advocacy—facilitated, in part, by their complex and collaborative, mutually beneficial relationship with major American news outlets like the Washington Post and the New York Times. The extent of that relationship is explored further in the following chapter.

CONTROLLING THE NARRATIVE: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE U.S. HELSINKI WATCH COMMITTEE

After the discussions between Bernstein, Laber, Goldberg and Bundy in the spring of 1978, a $25,000 planning grant was issued by the Ford Foundation to the Fund for Free Expression, and Bernstein’s group set to work recruiting participants for their new organization.² The press release announcing the establishment of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee touted the organization’s membership, consisting of “50 prominent Americans from business, law, the scientific and university communities, writing, publishing, the labor movement, and major civil rights organizations.” These claims sought to assure the public of the group’s significance, and its natural authority as a true voice of American civil society. From the outset, the high standing and personal patronage of Helsinki Watch’s members was one of the group’s primary assets in its promotion of human rights—an

¹ For more on the ways in which the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee stood apart from other contemporary nongovernmental human rights organizations, see Welch Jr., NGOs and Human Rights: Promise and Performance.
² Korey, Taking on the World’s Repressive Regimes, 102.
aspect of the organization that its founders assured the public “would in time be enlarged.”

Robert Bernstein, the group’s founder and chairman, described how he saw the high profile membership of the organization as being vital for gaining the visibility needed to help sway public opinion: “I looked to put together a masthead that would lend weight to our reports and press releases. . . . When I contacted people, I let them know that if they didn’t have time to actively participate, their names could be very useful, as it was a new organization and a new idea, and both needed stature and publicity.”

In much the same way that Bernstein considered Random House subsidiaries like Knopf, Pantheon, and Ballantine as a collection of creative units that retained their autonomy to develop authors and pursue ideas as they saw fit, Bernstein’s leadership of Helsinki Watch operated in a way that provided its members with the freedom to use their expertise to develop the most effective approach toward advocating for a specific issue. As described in the group’s first annual report, Helsinki Watch boasted a “relatively decentralized” organizational structure, comprised of “seven subcommittees, each responsible for a different aspect of Helsinki work.” These subcommittees would each report to their own Subcommittee Chairman, who was themselves supervised by the Executive Director and the Executive Committee. In this way, Helsinki Watch was able to monitor and act upon many of the issues that they found important to their mission simultaneously, developing the ability to project significant international influence in a relatively short period of time.

Although formally established in February 1979 with a $400,000 grant from the Ford Foundation, which was meant to finance the group through the start of the second CSCE review conference scheduled to begin in Madrid in November 1980, members of Helsinki Watch spent most of their first several months seeking to define themselves as an organization and determine the strategies that most suited their resources and expertise.

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4 Bernstein, Speaking Freely, 152.
6 Ibid.
This uncertainty of purpose called into question the proper balance that should be struck between domestic and international Helsinki monitoring, leaving the group’s members with conflicting assumptions about their fundamental objectives, and confused as to the organization’s ultimate direction and strategies. Evidence of this tension was reflected in the organization’s early staff restructuring. By April of its first year, Helsinki Watch had already parted ways with its first executive director, David Fishlow, who had come on board after making a name for himself at the ACLU. When taking the job, Fishlow assumed that U.S. Helsinki Watch—like the other Helsinki monitoring groups that had existed up to that point—would be primarily concerned with the observation of human rights domestically, and was not comfortable with the international focus that some of the group’s members envisioned.⁸

It seems clear that the short tenure and abrupt departure of David Fishlow was by no means an anticipated turn of events for the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee, as it left the nascent organization under pressure to fill the office. After almost two months without an executive director, Jeri Laber eventually stepped into the position in spite of the fact that the appointment of a woman to such a role sat uneasy with some of the Committee’s other founding members.⁹ This initial sense of disarray and confusion concerning the group’s ultimate purpose was not merely confined to those within the ranks of the organization. Initial public reception seemed to be equally at odds with the seemingly unclear intentions of the group’s founders. The title of the New York Times article that announced the formation of U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee declared: “Panel in New York to Monitor Human Rights in the U.S.” The piece went on to explain the group’s intention to “monitor United States compliance with the 1975 Helsinki agreements on human rights,” and to report on the degree to which the U.S. government had lived up to its agreements guaranteeing the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, speech, travel, and the reunification of families among its own people.¹⁰

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⁸ Laber, The Courage of Strangers, 100; 103; “U.S. Citizens’ Group Forms ‘Helsinki Watch’ Committee,” Andrei Sakharov Papers. For a more in-depth but still somewhat speculative account of the conditions surrounding David Fishlow’s appointment and sudden departure, see Korey, Taking on the World’s Repressive Regimes, 108-113
⁹ Laber, The Courage of Strangers, 104-105.
The United States by no means boasted a perfect record on the inviolability of its own citizens’ rights during this time. Equal rights for women and minorities, as well as economic and social rights continued to elude many disenfranchised groups throughout the country. Yet despite these ongoing challenges, the suggestion that there was some measure of equivalence between the conduct of the American government and those of the closed societies of Eastern Europe for which similar citizens’ Helsinki monitoring groups had been established drew sharp and immediate rebuke. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* published a week after the announcement of the newly formed U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee, professor of American Studies at Brandeis University Stephen Whitfield excoriated the group, calling it “superfluous,” and remarked that its very existence “must baffle Soviet dissidents and cheer their tormentors.” Whitfield accused the Committee’s founders of taking for granted the liberties that allowed them to even issue such a call for Helsinki implementation, while their opposite numbers in the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group languished in Soviet prisons and forced labor camps.

Such a scathing public indictment of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee at the very moment of its inception threatened the efficacy of the organization as a shaper of public opinion—jeopardizing, as it did, the group’s credibility in the eyes of its target audience—and demanded an immediate response. Although still in the process of coming to grips with their own sense of purpose internally, the organization’s leaders were forced to rebut these charges, and clarify their mission once and for all—for the public as much, perhaps, as for themselves. Turning the editorial pages of the *New York Times* as a public forum for such discussion, Bernstein and U.S. Helsinki Watch Vice-Chairman Orville Schell—a distinguished Wall Street lawyer and former president of the New York City Bar Association, who had a long record of championing human rights causes—rebutted the charges leveled against their organization by professor Whitfield. In their letter, they thanked the professor for acknowledging the degree to which the United States and the Soviet Union differed on their defense of human rights, but insisted that their organization’s true purpose was “incorrectly reported” by the *New York Times* when the

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12 Ibid.
original article was published in late February. In actuality, the Helsinki Watch press release announcing the formation of Committee began by unequivocally stating the group’s intention to “monitor U.S. compliance with the human rights provisions of the Helsinki accords”—a point it reiterated several more times throughout the document, only once amending this directive to include the phrase “the U.S. and other countries.” If a chief responsibility of the new U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee was to exercise its power as public relations vehicle, these first fumbling steps cast doubt at the outset concerning the group’s effectiveness and ability to control its own public image.

Instead of simply setting the record straight with this editorial, Bernstein and Schell took the opportunity to resituate the group’s purpose on a more solid foundation, publically committing their organization once and for all to the documentation and publication of violations committed by any and all signatory states of the Helsinki accords. Bernstein and Schell’s letter sought to emphasize the group’s credibility and fairness, stressing their organization’s belief that only by “holding ourselves accountable in an open and forthright manner [can] we earn the right to hold others accountable as well.” In this respect, the group pledged to take seriously any allegations regarding the U.S. government’s violation of Helsinki principles that it encountered, and would call upon domestic rights groups to investigate any of these alleged violations. But the letter concluded by unambiguously declaring the group’s connection to the greater Helsinki network which was tirelessly fighting for the rights of citizens in Eastern Europe: “[W]e will pay particular attention to East European countries where independent civil rights groups are suppressed and remedies are seldom available. In fact, the formation of our committee is a direct response to the appeal of the Moscow Helsinki Watch urging creation of such groups in other countries.”

14 “U.S. Citizens’ Group Forms ‘Helsinki Watch’ Committee,” Andrei Sakharov Papers.
THE TRANSNATIONAL DIMENSION OF U.S. HELSINKI ADVOCACY

After having publically declared the organization’s direct link to the activist networks of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the next step was for the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee to begin to prove itself capable of utilizing contact with those networks to aid in the defense of Helsinki principles within those closed societies. This meant coordinated action with other Helsinki monitoring groups in a way that could present U.S. lawmakers and the American public with a clear and unified message concerning the plight of these dissidents. U.S. Helsinki Watch sought to collect and disseminate information that could highlight the ongoing repression of Soviet and Eastern European governments, which stood in flagrant violation of the Helsinki agreements. The group’s members began to actively cultivate relationships with Soviet and Eastern European exiles now living in the West, which could provide important contact information, and the introductions needed to effectively collaborate with activists still involved with Helsinki monitoring inside those closed societies.

In a memo to Jeri Laber transmitted in April 1979, Helsinki Watch member Betsy Bullard detailed her recent contact with the Czech writer and publisher Antonín Liehm, who had emigrated to the West ten years earlier and who was, at that time, serving as a professor at the University of Pennsylvania after having previously held a teaching position at the City University of New York. In this case, it was contact with Liehm that was the important first step to establishing a meaningful link with Charter 77 activists in Czechoslovakia. “Liehm had telephoned yesterday to give me some additional addresses of Charter 77 members,” Bullard reported to Laber. Contacts such as these often provided additional access to a wider network of supporters who were sympathetic to the dissidents’ cause, which served to strengthen crucial transnational ties, and helped the group to develop increasingly sophisticated and effective systems of exchange. “[Liehm] also gave me the name and address of a Czech atomic scientist, Dr. Frantisek Janouch,” Bullard continued, “who is exiled in Sweden and with whom we should be in contact. He is

17 Miroslav Rechcigl Jr., *Beyond the Sea of Beer: History of Immigration of Bohemians and Czechs to the New World and Their Contributions* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2017), 619.
a very resourceful man, works closely with the Charter 77 people, and should be helpful to us.”

Liehm’s introduction of Janouch to committee members provided U.S. Helsinki Watch not only with a reliable and ongoing point of contact to Charter 77—and thus ability to consistently transmit information both to and from that country—but also the means to contribute materially to the Czech organization’s efforts. Earlier that year, a special fund had been established in Sweden to support persecuted Czech dissidents. Janouch served as the trustee of that fund, and could be relied upon to ensure that donations from the West made their way to the intended recipients. Among the fund’s contributors were the Danish and Norwegian branches of P.E.N., and the Norwegian Writers’ Union. In her memo, Bullard made clear that such an avenue for financial support would prove quite useful for Helsinki Watch’s efforts to assist these Czech dissidents, recommending to Laber that “contributions should be sent to Sweden.”

Finally, beyond advancing the quality, frequency, and value of transnational communication between activist organizations in the East and West, Western émigrés like Liehm would, at times, even serve as the very mode of transmission—particularly in the early days of the organization’s existence, when financial resources were limited and in-country experience was hard to come by. As with journalists and diplomats, these émigrés’ familiarity with the native language and customs—as well as an insider’s knowledge of the dissident networks operating within a particular country—provided an invaluable resource for the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee hoping to facilitate the flow of information into, and out of, these closed societies.

It was not unusual for individual citizens associated with the U.S. Helsinki Watch to serve as couriers of information when travelling to the Soviet bloc, often at significant risk to their own safety or interests. According to Bullard, Liehm played just such a role on one of his returns to Europe. At that time, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee was preparing to make contact with Eastern dissident organizations, to announce to these groups the

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18 Memorandum from Betsy Bullard to Jeri Laber, 27 April 1979, HRWR, Series I: Jeri Laber Files, Box 51, Folder 12.

Committee’s formation, and to declare their intention to lend support to the dissidents’ cause. As postal communication between Western activists and Eastern European dissidents was famously unreliable, Liehm agreed to personally carry these dispatches to several of the founding members of Charter 77. This willingness by individuals to take on, in some cases, significant liability in order to ensure the greatest chance of success for these transnational advocacy efforts seemed to impress upon the members of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee the responsibility that they had to serve as a reliable partner in this relationship. In this way, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee became ever more tightly bound within the greater transnational Helsinki network, and by extension, invested in the fate of the individuals who served it. “Next week we should write to Dr. Janouch,” Bullard concluded in her memo to Laber, “enlisting his help and cooperation and offering ours.”

Similar tactics to the ones used to make contact and secure mailing addresses for Charter 77 members were also used at this time for members of the Lithuanian Helsinki Watch Group as well as several of the founders of the Polish Workers’ Defense Committee—or KOR—which had taken on the responsibility of monitoring Helsinki compliance in that country. On 21 June 1979, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee released a mailing to these organizations, informing them of the creation of the United States Helsinki monitoring group and declaring its members’ intention to seek active collaboration with other Helsinki organizations in future monitoring efforts. In this letter signed by Bernstein and Schell, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee solemnly declared its unity of purpose with the greater transnational Helsinki network, and made clear that they deferred to these European organizations’ long histories of activism and experience in publicizing human rights abuses in their own countries.

We are very pleased to inform you of the formation of a U.S. citizens’ group dedicated to monitoring government compliance with the Helsinki Final Act. We have organized our group in large measure out of respect for the work of the brave men and women who organized the first such watch group in Moscow in 1976 and those who carry on the work of promoting observance with the Accords in each of the signatory states. . . . [W]e intend to monitor implementation of the Final Act both

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20 Memo from Bullard to Laber, 27 April 1979.
in the United States and, by working with other citizens groups, in other countries
which have signed the accords.\textsuperscript{21}

These remarks reflect the extent to which the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee
considered the formation of their organization to be in direct response to the appeals made
by the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group in their founding document released in May 1976,
calling on “the public of other states participating in the Helsinki Conference to form their
own national Support Groups to promote full implementation of the Helsinki Accords.”\textsuperscript{22}
The U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee’s letter to Eastern monitoring groups continued:

Consistent with this aim is our hope of cooperating on a regular basis with watch
groups in Eastern and Western Europe. . . . We will remain in touch with you in the
future, and we solicit your suggestions on how we can most fruitfully pursue our
work. . . . [W]e share a common responsibility as citizens of Helsinki signatory states
to report on violations of the Final Act and to work for their correction. Your advice
will be very valuable to us, and we hope that in the future we will be able to
communicate regularly.\textsuperscript{23}

It is clear that the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee saw this kind of transnational
activism as an essential element for the successful promotion of the Helsinki Accords, and
their importance to global security, to audiences back in the United States. However, it was
the implementation of the Accords themselves that helped ensure that such transnational
contact continued to be possible. The Accords thus became the very mechanism through
which the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee could fulfill its directive to monitor and report on
Helsinki abuses in other signatory states.

**RELIANCE ON TRANSNATIONAL ADVOCACY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HELSINKI WATCH STRATEGIES**

At the same time that the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee was developing
connections across transnational networks for the purposes of exchanging information and

\textsuperscript{21} Memorandum from Debbie Lauter to Jeri Laber and Andy Sommer concerning Letters to Soviet and East
European Helsinki Watch Groups, 21 June 1979, HRWR, Series I: Jeri Laber Files, Box 51, Folder 12.

\textsuperscript{22} “On the Founding of the Public Group to Support Compliance with the Helsinki Accords in the USSR,” 12
May 1976, in Orlov, Dangerous Thoughts, Appendix Two. The U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee was explicit on
this point elsewhere in public statements—perhaps most conspicuously in the organization’s first annual

\textsuperscript{23} Memorandum from Lauter to Laber and Sommer, 21 June 1979.
generating support, the group also needed to seek ways to build encouragement for their cause among American audiences. After Fishlow’s resignation in April, a small steering committee began to meet on a regular basis, to determine how best the organization should proceed in its efforts to aid in the fight for human rights. Comprised of many of Helsinki Watch’s most active members, the steering committee’s job was to reaffirm several of the organization’s primary objectives—chief among those was substantive participation in the CSCE Madrid Review Conference, due to convene in November 1980. At Madrid, Bernstein’s organization would be expected to provide the conference delegations with verifiable documentation of human rights abuses that could be used as evidence for determining the progress or limitations of Helsinki implementation up to that point. But the ways in which the group should gather and best present such information both to the American government and to the general public was still very much up for debate, and with only a little more than eighteen months before the Madrid Review was to begin, there was not much time remaining for Helsinki Watch to organize an approach to their human rights campaigning that could be expected to reliably deliver results.24

By May 1979, weeks after David Fishlow had stepped down, and while the organization was still without an Executive Director, psychiatrist and human rights advocate Willard Gaylin, who was co-founder of the Hastings Center and who sat on the Helsinki Watch board, contacted Jeri Laber to suggest steps that might move the strategic approach of the group forward. Gaylin served on the Subcommittee on the Free Flow of People and Ideas along with Laber, and in his letter, he echoed the feelings of the Subcommittee’s chairman, publisher and activist Winthrop Knowlton, when he said that the group’s efforts must not only be concerned with defining issues important to the maintenance of the Helsinki Accords and human rights protections generally, but must also be capable of helping real people in concrete ways—people who faced specific obstacles as a consequence of the Soviet government’s failure to live up to those same Helsinki agreements. Gaylin explained in his letter to Laber that “given the nature of the problem [of free expression] and the almost total impossibility of an American to visualize the kinds

24 Laber, The Courage of Strangers, 100; 103; “U.S. Citizens’ Group Forms ‘Helsinki Watch’ Committee,” Andrei Sakharov Papers.
of controls . . . that exist in the Soviet Union,” when seeking to raise American awareness, “the only way we can define issues is by personalizing.”

To this end, Gaylin suggested that the organization adopt a “case study method” in which U.S. Helsinki Watch would collect and present highly detailed and personal accounts depicting the struggles of real individuals, and the very human cost that the Soviet government’s repressive actions and failure to abide by its international agreements had upon the lives of its own citizens. In his letter to Jeri Laber, Gaylin proposed that the first such “test case” be that of Yuri Druzhnikov, a Soviet Russian writer and playwright whose petition to emigrate from the Soviet Union had led to his persecution by the authorities. The Druzhnikov case could be of particular use for Helsinki Watch, Gaylin said, not only because the Soviet author was nonpolitical, having never taken part in any political demonstrations or protests against his government, but because the information could be relied upon to be detailed and accurate. “I have absolute confidence in the facts as stated,” wrote Gaylin, “because they have been verified by someone whom I know, of impeccable integrity.” Although it is not clear from this letter who Gaylin’s contact was, this ability to have faith in the quality of the reporting of events was absolutely essential for the integrity of Helsinki Watch. Accurate reporting provided the nascent organization with the credibility and legitimacy it needed to be effective in the eyes of the American public as well as government officials when challenging the Soviet Union on their record of human rights.

This contact that Gaylin had with individuals who could reliably provide detailed information of events taking place inside the Soviet Union was just one more example of the larger transnational network that existed linking dissidents in the USSR with activists in the United States fighting to raise awareness on their behalf. The existence of these relationships and their ability to function as channels through which valuable information concerning human rights abuses could be passed made Helsinki Watch reporting possible and effective during the first critical few months of the organization’s existence, when information gathering missions undertaken by group members themselves were much more difficult. During this initial period, the personal relationships maintained by

25 Letter to Jeri Laber from Willard Gaylin, 18 May 1979, HRWR, Series I: Jeri Laber Files, Box 52, Folder 9.
26 Ibid.
members were often times the difference maker, providing Helsinki Watch with crucial access to information that could then be used for their organization’s purposes. Thus, the participation and contribution of influential members of American society who had access to those involved in this transnational network—journalists, politicians, scientists, and academics—was extremely significant to the organization’s efforts, not only as far their access to information inside closed Soviet society was concerned, but also in their ability to effectively disseminate that information back in the United States.27

Gaylin, in a second letter to Jeri Laber, who by June of 1979 had assumed her place as Executive Director of Helsinki Watch, once again brought up the case of Druzhnikov as a compelling opportunity for Helsinki Watch to advance a personalizing approach when raising awareness of human rights violations inside the USSR. In his letter, Gaylin informed Laber about an article he had recently received that was written by Druzhnikov, in which the Soviet writer detailed his ordeal in requesting permission to emigrate from the Soviet Union. Again relying on a personal acquaintance, Gaylin took this opportunity to publicize Druzhnikov’s account: “The article seemed so timely that I took a chance of calling a friend at the Washington Post. To my delight, it will be printed.”28 That Gaylin did this without prior consultation with the rest of the Free Flow Subcommittee demonstrates the relative freedom of action that Helsinki Watch members enjoyed at this time, to pursue the group’s human rights interests as they best saw fit. Gaylin apologized to Laber for his impetuosity, explaining that “things moved so fast that I didn’t have time to consult with the rest of you about how this might be tied into the work of Helsinki Watch.” “It will, of course,” Gaylin assured the new Executive Director, provided that they adopt the case study method that he was proposing.29

The U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee’s ability to acquire and transmit highly descriptive and emotional accounts of a Soviet citizen’s struggle for individual rights

28 Letter to Jeri Laber from Willard Gaylin, 9 July 1979, HRWR, Series I: Jeri Laber Files, Box 52, Folder 9.
29 Ibid.
provided the organization with a great advantage when promoting awareness of Soviet governmental repression to the American public. While Gaylin made his case to the rest of the Free Flow Subcommittee by citing specific Soviet violations of Helsinki protocols concerning family reunification and the free movement of peoples, Druzhnikov’s article on the other hand, published in the Sunday edition of the *Washington Post* on 15 July, struck a very different tone. The article made no mention of the Soviet government’s defiance of its international agreements, and in fact scarcely addressed the matter of emigration at all. Rather than a scathing indictment of the Kremlin’s Helsinki transgressions, the educational scholar and children’s author took a decisively apolitical approach—in keeping with his character and past behavior—in which he chose instead to present a highly personal account of life under Soviet rule, by providing to his reader an in-depth look at a particular phenomenon which was perennial to the Soviet experience: lines.30

Coming as the article did in the midst of the U.S. energy crisis of the late 1970s, the imagery of men and women waiting in line was a deliberate choice on the part of the author, meant to portray a shared sense of experience between both Soviet and American citizens. But whereas the lines in the United States were forming outside gas stations, Druzhnikov wrote of lines in the Soviet Union that existed for things which most Americans at that time would have certainly considered to have been basic everyday amenities, and which access to in the United States would have been largely taken for granted. Drawing upon personal details, Druzhnikov endeared himself to his American readers with emotionally driven stories concerning his birth, the circumstances under which he met his wife, and his desire to achieve a more comfortable life for himself and his family—personal milestones that were universal to the human experience, and that American audiences would easily have been able to understand and identify with.31

In an effort to further connect with his readers, Druzhnikov went on to describe yet another prototypically American experience—attending the cinema. His presentation of Soviet movie-going was meant to highlight the kind of deprivation and chronic dysfunction that average Soviet citizens faced in their daily lives, presenting the occasion as an absurd

distortion of what Americans would naturally picture as cinema attendance within their own society. American readers (certainly almost all of whom would have had personal experience attending movies themselves, and could therefore intimately relate to Druzhnikov’s story) were told of Soviets’ need to have to wait in line, not just for new movies, but for old movies as well, and—showing further deference to his American audience by appealing their natural sense of pride in their culture—of having to wait in line to buy tickets to a much-anticipated American movie more than a month in advance.32

Druzhnikov’s article went on to tell of his ordeal to buy a refrigerator and then a car in which he was forced to wait for a period of three years and seven years, respectively. Once again, these examples were both universal comforts of American living and thus evoked imagery that further helped demonstrate the contrast between the Soviet and American experience. In a particularly vivid passage, he confessed that only pictures of fresh fruit and vegetables—photographs cut out from an American-printed calendar—are, for him, as close as he and his family could get to such rare commodities in the Soviet Union. It was only after this long list of common everyday items that Druzhnikov presented to his reader a wholly foreign reason to need to wait in line: the permission to emigrate from one’s nation.33

This was the point in the article in which Druzhnikov chose to invoke the bond which he had established with his reader through his tales of common experience, to elicit sympathy for what his American audience would consider an inalienable right that he and others like him were deprived of.34 According to Gaylin, Druzhnikov’s ability to “dramatize” the plight of dissatisfied Soviet citizens in this way was exactly what made this case study strategy he was proposing so effective, since it gave U.S. Helsinki Watch the chance to frame the violation of Helsinki agreements in terms of their real-world consequences. The compelling nature of these sorts of personal appeals provided the opportunity for Helsinki Watch to powerfully mobilize public support behind defense of

32 Ibid.
34 Druzhnikov, ”I Was Born in a Line …".
international human rights agreements in a way that Gaylin assured Laber would “be most important for us.”

**TACTICS OF THE U.S. HELSINKI WATCH COMMITTEE IN THE CONTEXT OF EXISTING NONGOVERNMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY**

With the “case study” approach officially underway after the publication of Druzhnikov’s *Washington Post* article, the efforts of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee began to organize around a strategy that would best capitalize on the emotionally engaging presentation of the Soviet government’s Helsinki violations and human rights abuse. Gaylin’s decision to go public with Druzhnikov’s article seems, at least to some extent, to have forced the hand of Helsinki Watch, since it was only after the story ran in the *Washington Post* that Laber sent Gaylin her reply, notifying him of the approval of his proposal. In her letter, Laber informed Gaylin that, after consultation with other Helsinki Watch members, it had been decided that the group would use Druzhnikov’s petition to emigrate as the basis for a publicity campaign aimed at highlighting the Soviet’s failure to abide by the terms of the Helsinki Final Act. This was to be done using methods that the members of U.S. Helsinki Watch were most familiar with, and had employed to some success in the past. “We agreed,” Laber wrote on 26 July, “since he has now ‘gone public’ with his *Washington Post* article, to use that article as the taking off point for letters on his behalf.”

This campaign of letter writing was, in many ways, a continuation of strategies used by the organizational predecessors of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee—the International Freedom to Publish Committee and the Fund for Free Expression—of which prominent Committee members including Robert Bernstein, Winthrop Knowlton, Jeri Laber and others had all been involved.

It should be noted that the practice of raising awareness through letter writing was by no means a new phenomenon among nongovernmental human rights organizations, and had been a strategy perhaps made most visible through the efforts of Amnesty International, which, by the time Helsinki Watch was established, boasted more than 200,000 active members and supporters across 125 countries, and had a Nobel Peace Prize

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35 Letter to Laber from Gaylin, May 18, 1979.
36 Letter to Willard Gaylin from Jeri Laber, 26 July 1979, HRWR, Series I: Jeri Laber Files, Box 52, Folder 9.
Amnesty was in many ways a model—and indeed, a training ground—for many individuals who would later go on to be instrumental in other Western human rights organizations throughout the 1970s and 80s. Jeri Laber herself had begun her human rights work in Amnesty’s New York chapter, and it was through those activities that she had first made the acquaintance of Robert Bernstein.38

Although Amnesty’s place in the field of human rights promotion at this time was arguably second to none, its unparalleled stature was, in many ways, reflected in the somewhat restrained scope and limited depth of the organization’s advocacy strategies. By the late 1970s, the activity of Amnesty International consisted primarily of awareness-raising campaigns surrounding individual prisoners of conscience, and largely refrained from addressing broader patterns of abuse perpetrated by specific actors or governments. Furthermore, because of its desire to maintain its appeal and credibility internationally, the group rarely participated in the public “naming and shaming” of specific violators, and—in an effort to remain impartial, objective, and nonpartisan in its reporting—generally abstained from making particular policy recommendations for the purposes of counteracting abuse.39

Amnesty’s strategies were ill-equipped to adapt to certain post-Helsinki changes taking place within the societies of Eastern Europe, and the organization was slow to respond to the changing patterns of adjudication, which increasingly relied upon the support of public opinion for the denunciation of human rights violations. An example of this adaptation problem involves one of Amnesty’s most well known strategies: the symbolic adoption of “prisoners of conscience.” By the late 1970s, it was quickly becoming clear that there were a number of extra-legal ways in which a government could punish individuals and suppress dissent, short of actual arrest and imprisonment—particularly in states like the Soviet Union. Extrajudicial methods of coercion included harassment, eviction, threat of unemployment, and reprisals taken against family members, just to

name a few, and represented patterns of behavior for which the existing strategies of
Amnesty International at that time had little means of effectively combatting.40

While Bernstein considered the efforts of Amnesty International to be admirable, he
saw their scope as too limited, and firmly believed that international agreements like the
Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and—most significantly—the Helsinki Final Act
provided valuable starting points from which international pressure could effectively be
organized to stress responsibilities that existed between a government and its citizens.
Bernstein and others saw in their own organization the opportunity to move beyond
Amnesty’s limited focus on prisoners, and instead work to retrain world attention upon
sustained patterns of continual abuse, perpetrated systematically by state governments
that were party to international agreement.41

Furthermore, as a vanguard of the modern human rights movement, Amnesty
International, which was founded in 1961, found it necessary to devote much of their time
to developing and legitimizing a universally accepted notion of human rights standards and
international norms capable of effectively circumscribing what could be broadly
considered as acceptable or undesirable behavior of governments across a spectrum of
global society. In large part due to these efforts of Amnesty’s, successive human rights
NGOs such as U.S. Helsinki Watch were not similarly constrained by such time-consuming
practices, and thus enjoyed the freedom to pursue much more specific indictments of
states’ behavior, operating largely upon the assumption that the various international
covenants to which their work so closely hewed—the Universal Declaration of Human
Rights, the ICCPR/ICECSR, and, most recently, the Helsinki Final Act—effectively served as
the universally agreed-upon norms from which claims concerning the violation of human
rights could be measured and adjudicated.42

GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT: THE EVOLUTION OF U.S. HELSINKI WATCH
INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS AND THE ALLIANCE WITH AMERICAN MEDIA

40 Welch Jr., “Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch: A Comparison,” in Welch Jr. ed., NGOs and
Rights, 50-51.
41 Bernstein, Speaking Freely, 151.
In addition to overtures made directly to Soviet officials, Helsinki Watch’s letter writing campaign sought to elicit targeted support from American citizens with professional ties to the Soviet Union, who would have been capable of bringing greater visibility to the case of Yuri Druzhnikov and applying pressure within their respective industries. A draft appeal produced by Helsinki Watch in October 1979, which was intended for circulation among Americans within various professional fields, presented a brief biographical summary of Druzhnikov’s personal and professional life—as well as a description of his recent difficulties with the Soviet authorities—and called upon its recipients to do what they could to make their voices heard on his behalf. The appeal instructed that such expressions of support “should take the form of letters to Soviet political and literary officials, to the Union of Soviet Writers, to the Soviet Copyright Agency (VAAP), to all those Soviet groups and institutions which presently maintain business, scholarly and cultural relations with the West and hope to broaden them in the future.”

By tying the Soviet’s compliance in the field of human rights to the development of further economic, scientific, and technological relations between individuals and organizations within the United States and the USSR, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee—whether incidentally or deliberately—had invoked an integral concept codified within the international agreements of the Helsinki Final Act: the linkage between the treatment of citizens, and the cross-cultural cooperation that the Soviet Union desired. This approach conformed to many of the calls for support made by Eastern European and Soviet dissidents in their appeals to the West, whom the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee had actively sought to align itself with at this time. Bernstein’s group endeavored to become the embodiment of that principle of linkage, by making it a centerpiece of their efforts to advocate for the observance of human rights in the future. These early campaigns of letter writing were a crucial first step toward making that goal a reality.

44 Evidence of dissidents’ support for such an approach can be found throughout a multitude of different public statements, writings, and Congressional testimonies made in the West by several high profile Soviet activists during this period, including “Andrei Amalrik, on Détente,” New York Times, 22 October 1975; Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s speech delivered to the AFL-CIO trade union meeting in Washington D.C., 30 June 1975, reprinted in “Solzhenitsyn: The Voice of Freedom,” Pamphlet published by American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, Internet Archive, accessed 29 August 2015, https://archive.org/stream/SolzhenitsynTheVoiceOfFreedom/SVF2_djvu.txt; Testimony of Vladimir
This appeal to American professionals claimed that Druzhnikov’s decision to speak out publically against what Helsinki Watch called his “continued detention in the USSR” had made the Soviet writer more vulnerable to further reprisals by his government. By appealing to the West for support, Druzhnikov’s situation had now become “precarious,” and the group warned that his efforts to resist persecution “could not continue long without support from abroad.” Such petitions made by Helsinki Watch were often careful to stress the notion of individual responsibility—whether normative, professional or moral—that those in the West had to those who sought their assistance.

The participation and support of individuals from a variety of different professional backgrounds helped to bolster the credibility of U.S. Helsinki Watch, drawing upon a participating individual’s respective expertise, as well as extensive professional network, when advancing their future advocacy efforts and seeking to generate greater public awareness. By enlisting the support of professionals in various outside fields, the organization sought to amplify its human rights message in key areas, and target those industries and individuals whose action might have the greatest effect in the context of the particular case in question. Thus, Helsinki Watch tailored their approach to each case in ways that would foster the greatest amount of support from the most relevant and useful areas of society. “Colleagues in related professions—writers, publishers, editors, educators, psychologists, social scientists—are also asked to protest and to publicize his situation in progressional [sic] organs as well as open letters to the press and in articles.”

Another useful stratagem employed by Helsinki Watch in their campaign of letter writing was the practice of drafting letters to the editorial boards of American news outlets. As such letters are often published, this gave the organization the opportunity to speak directly to one of their primary target audiences, the American people, as well as provided better control over how each message was conveyed, stressing the details about a state’s

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45 “Draft Appeal for Western Support of Yuri Druzhnikov,” Jeri Laber Files.
46 Ibid.
human rights violations in a way that supported their cause. One such letter, sent to the editors of the *Washington Post* less than two weeks after Druzhnikov’s article appeared in print, demonstrates the way that the organization’s rather anodyne political message—advocating for the observance of international covenants—often complemented the personalized, highly emotional accounts put forth by Soviet dissidents. Such an appeal consciously traded on the emotional currency generated by Druzhnikov’s article, and underscored the point that the Soviets’ repudiation of the Helsinki Accords had real and painful consequences upon the lives of ordinary people.

Without addressing their own role in getting Druzhnikov’s article onto the pages of the *Washington Post*, Helsinki Watch’s letter to the editor, signed by Bernstein, Knowlton, and Gaylin, lamented the piece as “a timely but grim reminder of the contrasting realities of daily life, East and West.”\(^{47}\) Using the case to emphasize their goal of promoting observance of the Helsinki Accords, the letter went on to stress that “Mr. Druzhnikov’s . . . ordeal seems especially incomprehensible in light of the Soviet Union’s pledge in good faith to promote the reunification of families, made four years ago when Chairman Brezhnev signed the Helsinki Final Act.”\(^{48}\)

**RESOURCES AND NETWORKS OF THE U.S. HELSINKI WATCH COMMITTEE IN ACTION**

Although Helsinki Watch records indicate that Bernstein, Knowlton and Gaylin’s letter to the editor of the *Washington Post* was drafted on 26 July—the same day that Laber had initially responded to Gaylin’s proposal—the *Post* did not publish the letter until 31 August. While this delay after the initial publication of Druzhnikov’s article may at first seem to be at cross-purposes to the interests of the organization, the political circumstances surrounding the timing of the letter’s publication are worth appreciating in the context of larger American news developments. By taking care to acknowledge the contemporaneous political and social contexts in which these events unfolded, it is possible to see more clearly how the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee’s efforts to raise public awareness of Soviet repression benefitted directly from the personal friendships and

\(^{47}\) Letter to the Editor of the Washington Post from Robert L. Bernstein, Winthrop Knowlton, and Willard Gaylin, 26 July 1979, HRWR, Series I: Jeri Laber Files, Box 52, Folder 9.

\(^{48}\) *Ibid.*
common sympathies that members of the organization shared with many of those on the editorial boards of certain American media outlets.

On the morning 24 August 1979, Americans awoke to find the story of Soviet ballet dancer Aleksandr Gudonov on the front pages of newspapers all across the country. The previous day Godunov, a star dancer with the Bolshoi ballet, had left the supervision of his Soviet handlers while his company had been on tour in the United States, and walked into a New York immigration office to declare his intention to defect from the Soviet Union. Godunov’s sudden and unexpected defection shocked the art world, not only because he was an internationally renowned dancer, but also because no member of the Bolshoi ballet had ever defected before. But as significant as the Soviet performer’s decision was, the situation quickly became mired in a larger political conflict, after Godunov told State Department officials that he had reason to believe that his wife, Lyudmila Vlasova—another Bolshoi dancer who was with the company on its international tour—was being forced to return to the Soviet Union against her will.49

In response to these charges, the U.S. State Department interdicted the Aeroflot jetliner bound to depart for Moscow which had Ms. Vlasova aboard, until it could be determined that she was leaving of her own free will. A 72-hour, diplomatic standoff ensued between U.S. and Soviet officials, during which time the plane remained grounded at Kennedy International Airport, dominating American news coverage. Arguments made by State Department officials, analysts, and reporters brought to the fore of American public attention matters concerning the free movement of peoples and the reunification of families—both principles explicitly addressed within the Helsinki Final Act, and poignantly encapsulated by the plight of Yuri Druzhnikov.50

The relevance of these events to the efforts of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee was not merely limited to the continuity of their subject matter. Through a circuitous series of personal contacts, and in a compelling demonstration of the robust activism

network to which U.S. Helsinki Watch belonged and operated within, the lawyer retained by Godunov to assist in the negotiation process was none other than Orville Schell Jr., the vice-chairman of U.S. Helsinki Watch. When asked by journalists how he came to find himself representing Godunov at the center of this international diplomatic incident, Schell declined to answer, saying only that he was acting at the behest of “mutual friends,” and that he would be providing his services free of charge.\(^{51}\)

According to sources close to those involved, once Godunov had decided that he would defect, he had made contact with a friend in New York whom the Soviet ballet star believed could be of some assistance, and began making inquiries as to how he might go about seeking asylum. After affirming the sincerity of Godunov’s intention, and his genuine desire to go through with his decision, the friend telephoned the exiled Soviet poet and dissident Joseph Brodsky, who was at the time living in New York after being forced to leave the Soviet Union in 1972. In 1964, Brodsky had been arrested in Leningrad and tried for “parasitism” by the Soviet authorities. His was perhaps the earliest case in which the transcript of the trial had been successfully smuggled out of the country via *samizdat* and circulated throughout the West, later resulting in significant outside pressure on Soviet authorities for the commutation of the remainder of his sentence.\(^{52}\) Upon learning of Godunov’s situation, Brodsky brought the matter to the attention of Ed Kline, one of the founding members of U.S. Helsinki Watch and close personal friend of Robert Bernstein’s, whom Brodsky had known from Kline’s earlier work as a publisher of Russian dissident literature. Kline purportedly then raised the matter with Orville Schell, and suggested that Schell intervene on Godunov’s behalf.\(^{53}\)

Retaining the services of Schell did not merely provide the Soviet defector with a top-notch attorney who held a strong personal belief in human rights. It also extended to Godunov’s case the sort of affluence and personal network that members of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee so frequently utilized and that the organization actively sought to cultivate. Schell’s impressive career as a corporate lawyer on Wall Street provided him

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with unsurpassed reputation within the American legal community, and, like so many other members of U.S. Helsinki Watch, he had no shortage of personal friends in high places. In 1972, Schell had served as the president of the New York City Bar Association—a post he held until 1974, when he ceded the office to his close personal friend Cyrus Vance, who, by 1979 was serving as President Carter’s Secretary of State. According to Bernstein, it was at Schell’s urging that the State Department acted to keep Vlasova’s plane from departing in the first place.\textsuperscript{54}

Schell’s professional prominence and highly visible role as Godunov’s personal lawyer and spokesperson raised the public profile of U.S. Helsinki Watch in newspapers and among the American public in the final week of August 1979. By the end of the month, after days of front page coverage involving the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee, in what the \textit{New York Times} had called “a human rights confrontation that had grown into an international test of wills,” the organization and its members once again found themselves back in the news, this time after the sudden and unexplained cancellation of Bernstein’s visa to travel to the Soviet Union. At the time, Bernstein was preparing to head to Moscow as president of Random House publishing, to take part in the Second International Moscow Book Fair, which was to be held at the beginning of September. On the eve of his departure, the Soviets revoked his visa, leaving Random House’s delegation as well as other American publishers scrambling to make other arrangements.

There was a good deal of speculation among American journalists and political observers at the time whether this move by the Soviets was in some way in retaliation to Schell’s role in the Godunov-Vlasova affair. Bernstein’s relationship to Schell—as well as both men’s involvement in U.S. Helsinki Watch—was well known, and not twenty-four hours after Godunov had declared his intention to defect, had the Soviets announced the cancellation of Bernstein’s visa. Nevertheless, regardless of cause, news of the Soviets’ decision to revoke Bernstein’s visa prompted immediate reactions by American journalists, leading them to inevitably draw connections between the recent concern for Soviet human rights practices as a result of the Godunov-Vlasova affair, the rejection of Bernstein’s visa,

\textsuperscript{54} Goldstein, “Lawyer for Bolshoi Defector”; Bernstein, \textit{Speaking Freely}, 156.
the free flow of information in to and out of the Soviet Union, and the work of U.S. Helsinki Watch.\textsuperscript{55}

It was at this moment, in this politically charged environment, after more than a week of public appearances and published interviews, first by Schell and then by Bernstein, that the \textit{Washington Post} chose to run the U.S. Helsinki Watch letter to the editor concerning the plight of Druzhnikov. Efforts such as this, made by American news outlets like the \textit{Washington Post} to present their reporting to readers with an emphasis on continuity of message helped to amplify U.S. Helsinki Watch's public awareness campaigns, making these news outlets powerful allies in the work to spread information and raise public awareness about human rights. By utilizing the personalizing nature of the case study method that they had engineered, Helsinki Watch found effective ways to communicate to the American people reasons to care about specific violations of international agreements—violations that, up to this point, had gone on for years with little public objection. In their letter to the editor, Bernstein and Schell concluded with a charge that reaffirmed their group's purpose and portended their future efforts, saying that “the Soviet government [should be] reminded constantly of its commitments under the Helsinki Final Act.”\textsuperscript{56}

CONCLUSIONS

In the first several months of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee's existence, Bernstein and the group's other founding members sought to define their organization, and to find their place within the rapidly expanding environment of nongovernmental human rights activism that was taking shape during this time. Most of the group's members had some previous experience with human rights advocacy—for Bernstein and several others in the leadership, this was often closely tied to their work as publishers, and involved the defense of free expression for writers and dissidents abroad. This kind of activism often required direct collaboration and contact with Soviet political dissidents, through


\textsuperscript{56} Letter to the Editor, 26 July 1979.
negotiations and publication of their written works. Furthermore, as influential figures within their field, it was quite common for these future Helsinki Watch members to utilize many of the personal and professional contacts they possessed as a means of facilitating this human rights work. This reliance on personal and professional connections would later become a defining feature of many of the strategies that the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee pursued during the group’s earliest campaigns. Such advantages helped the organization to quickly become a formidable champion of human rights on the national and international stage.

As a U.S.-based Helsinki monitoring organization, there was some expectation, both within the organization and without, that the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee would perform some measure of oversight when it came to its own government’s deficiencies with respect to the Helsinki Agreements. However, as the group’s founders made clear, they did not want to simply duplicate the efforts of work being done by existing American nongovernmental organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the American Civil Liberties Union, along with the many other ethnic and religious organizations that had carved out well-defined roles for themselves as facilitators of American social progress. Instead, in the context of domestic compliance with the Final Act, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee aimed to supplement the work being done by these organizations by using research these groups collected to answer key questions about the U.S. government’s fulfillment of the agreement, thus helping to generate greater public awareness of the Helsinki Accords’ value in human rights advocacy.57

When it came to the Committee members’ primary area of interest—monitoring the Helsinki compliance of other participating states, particularly the closed societies of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe—it seems that a strikingly similar approach was adopted with respect to Helsinki monitoring groups in those countries. Individual dissidents and groups who faced persecution by their own governments as a result of their political or cultural activities could provide the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee with valuable documentation of specific Helsinki violations that the American organization could then

use to assist in their efforts to publicize foreign governments’ failure to live up to their multilateral commitments. Committee members, drawing upon their previous human rights experience in fields like literary freedom, where collaboration with the victims of repression figured so prominently, found these dissident groups to be a natural and important ally in their work to defend Helsinki guarantees in the Soviet Union and elsewhere throughout Eastern Europe. Personal and professional connections helped to advance U.S. Helsinki Watch’s interests in this respect as well, as the Committee took conscious steps to expand its influence network transnationally by cultivating substantive and robust contacts with individuals and groups that could provide their organization with the resources they needed to be effective.

This broad approach helped to establish a reputation for U.S. Helsinki Watch as an organization that could be relied upon to provide detailed documented cases of abuse to representatives of the U.S. government and international organizations seeking to hold governments accountable for their commitment to the Final Act. But where the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee exerted its most significant influence was in the minds and hearts of the American public. With the use of savvy media strategies, the group’s early advocacy campaigns made a concerted effort to humanize the struggle of Soviet dissidents, and bring the desire and responsibility to defend Helsinki principles out of the halls of Congress and the State Department, and into the hands of the American people. It was this ability of U.S. Helsinki Watch to sensitize the American public to the persecution of dissidents that enabled the organization to begin to pursue more sophisticated and complex advocacy strategies by the end of their first year of activity. These strategies involved subtle but important attempts to recast popular American perceptions concerning the violations of citizens’ rights in other countries.

Building upon their own public awareness campaigns, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee made a concerted effort to appeal directly to key segments of the American private sector. The Committee solicited support from individuals and groups by calling attention to known cases of repression, and asking that such violations be addressed in the

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course of any economic, scientific, or cultural exchange between those private individuals and groups and the offending state in question. Specific human rights violations became the grounds upon which private citizens and policymakers alike could claim that Soviet and East European governments were failing to uphold their commitment to foster greater cooperation in these fields, by virtue of the fact that such repressive action inevitably harmed the ability of such cross-cultural cooperation to take place. By promoting a strategy of “moral linkage,” in which progress in greater scientific, economic and cultural cooperation between societies could be measured as a function of the degree to which humanitarian protections were being observed, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee sought to reinforce within American society the internalization of some of the most extraordinary provisions that the Helsinki Final Act had to offer. This strategy not only invoked the foundational concept contained within the Helsinki agreements, which demanded that participating state governments demonstrate respect for the rights and freedoms of their citizens in the course of all their continuing mutual relations, but it also directly empowered individual citizens to know and act upon their rights in the course of those interstate relations. These campaigns and their effects are explored in more detail in the following chapter.
CHAPTER THREE:

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HELSINKI PROCESS BY NONGOVERNMENTAL ACTORS FOR THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The advocacy strategies developed by Helsinki Watch in the first year of the organization’s existence illustrate the extent to which the group relied upon coordination and collaboration with Eastern activists and the transnational networks that connected them. A closer examination of these strategies reveals the contribution that the U.S. Helsinki Watch made to the field of international human rights advocacy as a result of the organization’s work to bring concern for the abridgement of human rights more prominently into the process of nongovernmental East-West exchange. This chapter will look more closely at the contexts in which Helsinki Watch invoked the observation of the Helsinki Accords’ humanitarian articles, and by extension, advocated for the observance of new, human rights norms. The analytical focus of this chapter will center upon the specific tactics used by the organization when promoting its human rights advocacy campaigns to American audiences.

Earlier human rights organizations such as Amnesty International or the International League for the Rights of Man approached their human rights advocacy from a conceptual foundation that drew legitimacy from an inherent respect for particular human rights ideals.¹ By contrast, in the earliest years of its existence, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee pursued the achievement of its human rights objectives, not through lofty campaigns calling for the abolition of torture, or the release of all political prisoners, but rather through targeted appeals focusing on a particular obstacle to the process of cultural exchange taking place between Eastern and Western society. The signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 had bestowed upon the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee a codified framework through which the citizens’ organization could encourage the arbitration of particular human rights violations by advancing calls for progress in improving practical, measurable areas of cooperation in other fields. This chapter will illustrate that process.

¹ See Eckel, “The International League for the Rights of Man, Amnesty International, and the Changing Fate of Human Rights Activism.”
By engaging with professional organizations and individuals involved in cross-cultural exchanges where a particular human rights violation was in some way directly relevant, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee sought to reinforce a kind of “moral linkage” between ongoing East-West cooperation and a government’s treatment of its own citizens. This helped to expand the existing normative international framework for the defense of human rights by increasing the opportunities for a wider number of interest holders to effectively arbitrate alleged abuses. The U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee—equipped with detailed information provided by Eastern Helsinki monitoring groups across transnational activism networks that they helped establish, enlarge and reinforce; assisted by members’ abundance of contacts throughout American government, the media, and a variety of professional fields; and armed with the text of the Helsinki Final Act—was in a unique position to conduct highly visible advocacy campaigns in support of specific human rights protections. It was this distinctiveness as a Western nongovernmental human rights organization that enabled the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee to so effectively target appeals toward private actors outside the bounds of official governmental policymaking, whose involvement with these closed societies was the result of the increased cultural cooperation encouraged through the process of détente and the Final Act specifically.

In this chapter I will delve more deeply into several specific human rights advocacy campaigns mounted by the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee in the earliest years of the group’s existence. I will the investigate various strategies used by the Committee in the context of these campaigns, paying close attention to the pragmatic, real-world terms in which the organization articulated the violation of individual rights, as well as the way in which the group framed its proposals for corrective action. I will begin by examining U.S. Helsinki Watch members’ involvement in the Second International Moscow Book Fair, which took place in September 1979—one of the organization’s first sustained attempts to actively confront the Soviet authorities for their ongoing obstruction of individual rights through the framework of cultural exchange.

Within the context of the Book Fair example, I will show how American journalists functioned as an indispensible part of the transnational networks that were used by the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee to publicize the repressive action taken by the Soviets to censor various books and authors. I will also show how such contact with journalists
simultaneously provided members of the organization with greater access to dissident networks inside the USSR. These connections with dissidents ultimately enabled U.S. Helsinki Watch to develop more sophisticated advocacy strategies, as they were able to build upon their increased coordination with activists to better highlight the exact nature and extent of Soviet human rights abuses. The U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee then used its extensive social and professional contacts to effectively present this information to those American professional communities with whom these appeals were most likely to resonate—whether due to some degree of perceived personal complicity, professional solidarity, or the preservation of ethical standards called for within their field.

Next, I will examine the U.S. Helsinki Watch campaign against the Soviet government’s interruption of international postal communication—an issue that had been pursued by the organization at some level since the summer of 1979. After briefly describing the documented extent of the Soviet government’s non-delivery of mail, I will trace how the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee seized upon the promises of due regard for existing international obligations contained within Basket I of the Helsinki Final Act as a way to challenge this abuse. By taking this approach, U.S. Helsinki Watch made a conscious choice to frame the Soviets’ disruption of postal communication as a failure of that government to comply with the internationally agreed-upon framework governing the process of free and fair international exchange, rather than as a violation of Soviet citizens’ fundamental human rights. An examination of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee’s public outreach surrounding this issue reveals that, once again, a concerted effort was made by the group to convey to members of particular American professional communities—scientists, psychologists, and publishers—the onerous burden that such disregard for existing international obligations placed upon cross-cultural cooperation within their fields. In addition to providing information, the U.S. Helsinki Watch encouraged individuals

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to speak out in opposition of these restrictions on postal communication, and even counseled them on how to do so.

Finally, I will explore perhaps some of the most explicit steps taken by the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee to reinforce the relationship between international cooperation and the observation of human rights in the minds of American citizens. The Conference on Soviet-American Exchange and Human Rights—organized and hosted by the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee in the spring of 1980—sought to educate American professionals involved in cross cultural exchanges about the impact that Soviet disregard for the humanitarian articles of the Helsinki Final Act had on the process of more free and forthright exchanges between societies. The conference emphasized the ways in which restrictions on the free flow of people, ideas, and information within Soviet society impeded the success of American efforts in these exchanges. The conference organizers used case studies of various past cross-cultural events to present participants with practical training on ways to address the obstacles encountered in their dealings with closed societies. In the course of this training, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee members also proposed steps that could be taken by Americans to press Soviet officials on their government’s denial of human rights in the course of their mutual relations, further reinforcing their strategy of “moral linkage.”

ADVANCING U.S. HELSINKI WATCH STRATEGIES: THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL MOSCOW BOOK FAIR

In September 1979, the opportunity arrived to expand the work of U.S. Helsinki Watch in substantial ways. This came with the start of the Second International Book Fair, to be held in Moscow. Both Robert Bernstein and Jeri Laber had made arrangements to travel to Moscow to participate in the fair—Bernstein, in his capacity as president of Random House publishing, and Laber as part of a delegation from the Association of American Publishers. Both had expected to use this opportunity to advance the work of the their organization, but after Bernstein’s visa was revoked on the eve of his departure, the task fell to Laber to represent the interests of the U.S. Helsinki Watch alone.4

4 Laber, The Courage of Strangers, 109; Bernstein, Speaking Freely, 155–56.
Bernstein’s prominence in the publishing industry, his history of outspokenness on human rights issues, and his indisputable notoriety as the head of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee made him a natural target for Soviet officials concerned with Western ideological subversion. Jeri Laber, on the other hand, did not elicit the same degree of scrutiny from Soviet officials. In her visa application, Laber made no mention of her association with the human rights organization Helsinki Watch. The official stated purpose of her trip was to help organize the AAP exhibit, “America through American Eyes” at the Moscow Book Fair—a carefully selected anthology of works by American authors covering a variety of different subjects all chosen to highlight the diversity of thought that existed in the United States. In addition to her work for the AAP, Laber sought to use her access to the Second International Moscow Book Fair to illustrate the ways in which the Soviet government’s failure to realize its pledge for more open dissemination of information had adversely affected the process of greater cultural exchange between the East and West. Her responsibilities to the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee included documenting violations of free expression and censorship at the exhibition, publicizing at every opportunity the arbitrary revocation of Robert Bernstein’s visa, and making contact with various Soviet dissidents, including the remaining members of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group who were not yet imprisoned or in exile.

In the days prior to the start of the Moscow Book Fair, U.S. Helsinki Watch members back in New York utilized the heightened public profile their group had achieved as a result of members’ involvement in the recent Godunov affair and the denial of Robert Bernstein’s visa to express through American media the ways in which the Soviet government’s recent actions stood in opposition to the promotion of greater cooperation between American and Soviet society. After the decision to bar Bernstein from the exhibition had been affirmed by the Soviet Embassy in Washington, Random House released a statement to the press describing the move as “wholly incompatible with the spirit of free exchange of ideas” that the Soviet government had committed itself to when it accepted the terms of the Final Act. In his own statements to the press, Robert Bernstein further stressed this link between the abridgement of individual rights and the process of economic and cultural exchange,

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6 “Random House Press Release,” 29 August 1979, HRWR, Series I: Jeri Laber Files, Box 52, Folder 3.
remarking that although "the Soviets have said repeatedly that they want to do business with the West," the action taken against him suggested that they were less than sincere about a truly honest and forthright exchange. “Businessmen should take note,” Bernstein cautioned, “that [when] dealing with the Soviets, good faith is not enough.” He added that while Random House declined to send along the rest of its delegation in protest of the decision, it would still allow its materials to be sent to the book fair and displayed by other participants since, unlike the Soviet government, the American publishing house “shouldn't be in the position of blocking the free flow of ideas.”

Once again in this example, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee is seen using American media to publicize the restrictive practices of the Soviet government, while simultaneously helping to shape the narrative to convey the Soviet’s behavior as a refusal to comply with Helsinki principles, and an obstacle greater cooperation. This use of American media to further tie the protection of rights like free expression to the issue of cultural exchange continued even among participants in the exhibition itself. Prior to her arrival in the Soviet Union, Laber had sent letters to various foreign correspondents serving in Moscow, informing them of the potential for censorship at the Moscow Book Fair and volunteering her services as a source of information for that story. That Laber chose to utilize the foreign correspondents in this way was in keeping with Helsinki Watch members’ experience when dealing with American news media up to this point. This usefulness was reflected in comments made by Willard Gaylin in a letter he wrote to Jeri Laber the previous July, when he was seeking to publicize Yuri Druzhnikov’s situation. At that time, Gaylin described the Washington Post as being “most cooperative” in assisting the organization’s efforts to publicize the human rights abuses the Soviet writer faced, and suggested that such news outlets “may be a strong potential ally for us in future work.”

Once in the USSR, Laber kept careful track of the work of Soviet censors at the Moscow Book Fair, closely monitoring their activity relating to the AAP’s “America through American Eyes” exhibit. Each day, she would also stop into other exhibitors’ booths, asking after information concerning missing or confiscated books. At night, she would work in her

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hotel room, updating the handwritten lists of censored material from the previous day, and drafting duplicate copies for distribution among American correspondents the following morning. Laber remarked in her memoirs that these journalists had been most focused on the number of censored books—totals that changed by the day—which allowed these newspapers to keep their readers informed on the latest developments. Having these correspondents continually at her disposal in this way gave Laber ample opportunities to publicize Soviet efforts to restrict the flow ideas and information, and to press the matter of the denial of visas to people like Robert Bernstein. This ensured that Bernstein’s name—as well as the connection between the Soviet Book Fair and issues of free expression and human rights—remained a central part of the American news coverage of this cultural event.9

Since the inception of the Soviet human rights movement in the mid-1960s, foreign journalists had played an important part in supporting dissidents’ human rights activities—raising these activists’ international notoriety and publicizing their struggles in the West. Over time, a number of foreign correspondents stationed in Moscow came to be personally acquainted with many of these individuals, who had either served at one time or another as sources for their reporting, or were the subjects of stories that these reporters covered. Eventually, these connections often led American journalists to form personal relationships with many of the most important figures in the dissident movement. Foreign correspondents’ unique place as outsiders who possessed the time, resources, and will to develop meaningful contact with known and often targeted enemies of the state created a dependable link between Soviet activists and Western publics, which increasingly provided these dissidents with an otherwise unattainable degree of international attention, as well as access to assistance and information from abroad. As time passed, these relationships grew stronger, reinforcing what—by the mid-to-late 1970s—would become critical

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channels of communication over which the passage of information and even coordination between organized human rights groups could take place.\textsuperscript{10}

The personal and professional relationships that developed between Jeri Laber and American foreign correspondents during the Moscow Book Fair allowed Laber to become particularly close to Anthony Austin of the \textit{New York Times} and Kevin Klose of the \textit{Washington Post}—two veteran journalists who had made a name for themselves while serving in Moscow, and who were responsible for some the most regular and extensive coverage of the cultural exhibition in American newspapers.\textsuperscript{11} But as important as it was for the advocacy efforts of the U.S. Helsinki Watch to have a reliable channel through which its members could frame Soviet censorship to audiences back home as an obstacle to greater cultural cooperation, perhaps the most valuable role these journalists played was as facilitators of direct personal contact between Laber and Soviet dissidents in Moscow. Contributing to the development of in-person communication was yet one more way that journalists served as crucial intermediaries in the transnational networks that were developing between Western activists and dissidents inside the Soviet Union.


\textsuperscript{11} See footnote 6.
At one point during the week-long exhibition, Klose and Austin brought Laber to the home of Lev Kopelev and Raisa Orlova—two dissidents who were little known at the time outside of their own circles, but were widely renowned among Moscow intellectuals as dedicated activists on the forefront of the human rights movement. The meeting occurred in the Kopelevs' tiny, two-room apartment on Red Army Street in Moscow. That apartment had long been a fixture of Moscow's intellectual life, and was later described by Klose, who was well acquainted with the Kopelevs, as “an intellectual switchboard where people from all over the country could plug in, cross-connect, and transfer ideas.” Laber's access to such a network, and to Soviet dissidents so centrally embedded in Russia's activist culture propelled the work of U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee forward during this critical time in the organization's development—augmenting the group's already notable sway in American society by virtue of its elite membership and well-placed connections, with more direct and substantive contacts to a dissident network that could be reliably depended upon to provide detailed and accurate information concerning Soviet human rights abuse.

One evening during the Moscow Book Fair, in the spirit of cultural exchange and in an effort to help promote freer expression, the Association of American Publishers had arranged to host a dinner for Soviet writers whose work was known in the West. This included writers whose work was prohibited in the Soviet Union for political reasons. As a delegate of the AAP, the task of organizing this dinner fell to Jeri Laber. Eager to further advance the development of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee's communication network inside the USSR, Laber used the occasion to expand her contacts into the Soviet dissident

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12 Laber, *The Courage of Strangers*, 113–14; Klose, *Russia and the Russians*, 320. Laber’s intention to meet with Raisa Orlova and Lev Kopelev was itself a consequence of an earlier encounter facilitated by another American journalist, Peter Osnos, this time between the Kopelev’s and Robert Bernstein. During Bernstein’s third trip to Moscow in 1976 he had contacted Osnos who was at that time serving as the Moscow Bureau Chief for the *Washington Post*, and expressed his desire to see the less accessible parts of the city. Much like the role Kevin Klose and Anthony Austin played for Jeri Laber in 1979, Osnos drew upon his intimate knowledge of Soviet intellectual circles and dissident networks and introduced Bernstein to scores of Soviet writers, as well as many other prominent dissidents. This not only included both Raisa Orlova and Lev Kopelev, but also the mathematician and *refusenik* Anatoly Scharansky (later known as Natan Sharansky after his emigration to Israel in 1986), and by extension, the world-renowned physicist and human rights activist Andrei Sakharov and his wife and activist Elena Bonner. Bernstein later attributed these meetings—and Osnos’ part in them—as a seminal moment in the course of his own involvement with human rights. Bernstein, *Speaking Freely*, 137-139; “Robert Bernstein – Book Publishing and Human Rights: What’s Ahead in Perilous Times,” YouTube video, 53:42, recorded by the City University of New York (CUNY) on 8 February 2017, posted by "Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College," 14 February 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNjWl8v4Mak.
literary community. She worked in close collaboration with Raisa Orlova when compiling the guest list for the dinner, which was to be held on 7 September at the Aragvi, a fashionable Georgian restaurant in the heart of central Moscow.13

Among the more than forty guests in attendance were Vasily Aksyonov, the writer and cultural pioneer of the shestidesyatniki, or “generation of the 1960s,” whose work fell out of favor after his participation in the unsanctioned publication of the samizdat (meaning “self-published”) journal Metropol, which skirted official state censorship; Vladimir Voinovich, the Russian poet and satirist expelled from the Soviet Writers’ Union in 1974 after his solidarity protests in favor of greater freedom of expression for writers; Pyotr Yegides, who had been dismissed from his job and ejected from the Communist Party in response to his role as the primary editor of the unsanctioned Soviet political journal Poizki, or Searches; Georgi Vladimov, the well-known Thaw era author who, in 1977, had renounced his membership in the Soviet Writers’ Union and began serving as president of the Moscow Chapter of Amnesty International; and Viktor Erofeyev, a French-born Russian novelist who was ostracized within the Soviet Union following the foreign publication of Metropol, which he helped to edit.14

In addition to these and other censored writers, internationally recognized members of the Soviet dissident community were also in attendance, including the historian Roy Medvedev, Anatoly Marchenko, his wife and outspoken Soviet dissident Larisa Bogoraz, as well as the renowned nuclear physicist and international figurehead of the Soviet human rights movement, Andrei Sakharov. In a direct connection to the ongoing work of Helsinki Watch, Laber also made sure to extend an invitation to Yuri Druzhnikov, with whom she wished to meet to discuss his status as a test case for the organization. The

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event was monitored closely by the police, and condemned in that evening’s broadcast over Moscow radio.15

While Laber only had the chance to speak to Druzhnikov briefly during their initial meeting at the AAP dinner, after introducing herself and telling him of her connection with the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee, the Soviet writer invited her to dinner with his family in two days’ time. In a confidential memorandum delivered to the rest of the Free Flow Subcommittee, the Executive Director gave her impressions of the man, and summarized that encounter: “I found Druzhnikov extremely likeable, quick, lively, sophisticated, well read—all in all quite suitable as a ‘test case’ as suggested by Will Gaylin.” Laber was thoroughly impressed by Druzhnikov’s level of insight concerning opportunities for potential advocacy on his behalf, remarking at one point that it was “as if he were reading my mind.” “[H]e was consistently one step ahead of me in making suggestions about specific things that we had already discussed at our subcommittee meetings and that I had intended to ask him,” Laber reported to the group’s other members. “It was as if he had thought these things through on his own and had come to similar conclusions before I even had the opportunity to suggest them to him.”16

This level of perceptiveness and insight is a testament to the degree to which Druzhnikov—like so many other dissidents involved in the Soviet human rights movement of the 1960s and 70s—was capable of assisting Western groups like the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee in their efforts to promote individual rights. Dissidents frequently functioned as highly valuable and proficient partners in the work of Western human rights activism, despite the fact that very few of them had any formal training in key areas such as legal justice or human rights advocacy. These dissidents could reliably provide useful guidance concerning the specific social contexts in which a particular advocacy effort would be most effective—insights which Western activists unfamiliar with the exigencies of Soviet society often lacked. Using the lessons learned through their own lived experience, members of organized Soviet dissident groups—whether independently or in collaboration with

Western actors—were well equipped to address some of the most pressing challenges facing individual rights within their society.\(^\text{17}\)

**THE SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT ESTABLISHED THROUGH TRANSNATIONAL ADVOCACY**

During Laber and Druzhnikov’s meeting, one issue the pair discussed was the matter of Druzhnikov’s petitioned emigration to Israel. Because of the ease with which Soviet citizens were able to obtain exit visas to immigrate to Israel relative to any other country, the overwhelming majority of citizens seeking to depart the Soviet Union filed requests listing Israel as the desired destination for emigration.\(^\text{18}\) So too was this the case with Druzhnikov. However, since his closest living relatives resided in the United States and not Israel, some members of the Helsinki Watch Committee had misgivings about the effectiveness of using Druzhnikov as a “test case” for issues concerning family reunification so long as his official destination was somewhere other than where his family resided. Although Druzhnikov sincerely desired to be reunited with his sister and brother-in-law in the United States, Helsinki Watch members did not wish for him to take any action that might jeopardize his chances of securing approval from his government to leave the Soviet Union.\(^\text{19}\)

Yet in discussions with Laber, it was Druzhnikov who broached the matter of family reunification, expressing his interest in switching the destination of his emigration application to the United States. He also inquired as to the possibility that Helsinki Watch would be able to secure a formal invitation for him to relocate there. “He would like to be invited by a publisher or a university to come to the States for one year,” Laber informed the rest of the Free Flow Subcommittee in her memo, “in order to lecture on modern Soviet

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\(^\text{19}\) Letter to Laber from Gaylin, 18 May 1979.
literature or, alternatively, on the history of Russian and Soviet pedagogy or Soviet children's literature. All of these are subjects on which he feels competent [sic] to speak.”

By facilitating such an invitation, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee helped to bolster Druzhnikov's request for resettlement in the United States by providing his application for emigration with a dimension of cultural and professional exchange, in addition to his existing claim of family reunification.

The decision by Druzhnikov to accept foreign assistance in an attempt to relocate to the United States after having already been denied permission to emigrate to Israel illustrates the extent to which the Soviet writer had come to rely upon this system of transnational advocacy for his deliverance. Druzhnikov's case stands as a testament to the many political dissidents at this time who understood that when challenging the will of the Soviet authorities, their most likely chance of success lay in their total commitment to a strategy of international public pressure. “[Druzhnikov] seems completely aware of the fact that he has now ‘gone public’ and he is prepared to do whatever is necessary to secure his right to emigrate,” Laber reported to her colleagues. “He has obviously made the decision to solicit as much publicity as possible and seems aware of the pros and cons of doing so.”

Those “cons”—in addition to increasing persecution by the authorities—involved being ostracized from the lifelong social and professional communities that Druzhnikov had made himself a part of, and being subjected to heightened attack by the members of those communities who were convinced that the Soviet writer had become yet another pawn of Western imperialist subversion. The “pros” however, like Fenwick’s “spotlight,” meant heightened visibility among a larger transnational community, including a professional network that could provide an individual with the resources and attention necessary to withstand such an onslaught. In his conversation with Laber, Druzhnikov actively solicited such support, and suggested certain steps that might be taken on his behalf, which the members of the Free Flow Subcommittee had not yet explored. “Druzhnikov had other suggestions to make,” the Executive Director continued in her memo. “[H]e suggested that we get him a membership in PEN, something which I promised

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21 Ibid.
to arrange. The provision of this type of support by the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee not only fostered greater resiliency among these individual dissidents, but also expedited the development and reinforcement of the transnational connections that formed the basis of their organization’s unique brand of human rights advocacy.

Because of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee members’ visibility within the publishing and literary communities, as well as Yuri Druzhnikov’s standing as a well-known Soviet author, a letter writing effort to members of the literary world was a natural avenue of appeal, and an example of the kind of specialized targeting utilized in the advocacy strategies of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee. In addition to the membership in PEN secured by Jeri Laber, archival evidence shows that over the course of the Druzhnikov campaign, Helsinki Watch members consistently took steps to enlist the help of those in the literary community when raising the matter of Druzhnikov’s emigration. In letters sent to several prominent American authors who would be participating in an international writers’ conference due to take place in the autumn of 1980, Helsinki Watch members implored these individuals to bring the recent persecution of Yuri Druzhnikov to the attention of their Soviet colleagues, and to question the de facto expulsion of Druzhnikov from the Writers’ Union, as well as the grounds on which multiple Moscow publishing houses had chosen to cancel the production of several of his most recent works. Ultimately, U.S. Helsinki Watch had received the list of conference participants too late to organize their appeal for intervention at the conference itself. However, they nevertheless passed along the information they had gathered concerning Druzhnikov’s case, with the expectation that these authors could be of some assistance in their future endeavors.

These transnational networks that developed between Soviet dissidents and American human rights organizations were more than just avenues of communication. They were robust support systems that provided resiliency for their most vulnerable members through opportunities for professional advancement, increased public visibility, and concentrated lobbying efforts by those in positions of real authority. This type of

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22 Ibid.
23 Letter to Jeri Laber from PEN America Center, 6 December 1979, HRWR, Series I: Jeri Laber Files, Box 52, Folder 9.
24 Letter to Helen Sen and Jeri Laber from Ella Minuhin, 15 October 1980, HRWR, Series I: Jeri Laber Files, Box 52, Folder 9; Letter to Ella Minuhin from Helen Sen, 8 December 1980, Ibid.
support was exemplified in the relationships that Druzhnikov developed with individuals in the West as a result of his connections with the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee. By November 1979, Druzhnikov had received the fourth denial of his application for emigration from the Soviet Union. There he was forced to remain, unable to find work as a result of his efforts to emigrate. His written works were systematically removed from circulation and he was effectively blocked from any and all attempts to practice his profession.

It was only by virtue of these contacts with the West that he managed to continue to be published. As Druzhnikov later explained: “I was living and writing in the 70s and 80s in Moscow, but being published in the Washington Post, and the New York Times, and in the Swedish [newspaper] Expressen; in Russian in [Sergei] Dovlatov’s Novy Americanets, the New York magazine Vremya i my, and the [Israeli-based Russian literary] magazine Dvadtsat’ dva.” “I frequently didn’t even know where else,” Druzhnikov continued, “since what I had sent out to the West had trickled everywhere throughout the world.”\(^\text{25}\) It was only thanks to these transnational networks that Druzhnikov was able to continue to publish over the period of several years that he was ostensibly barred from working in his own country.

Eventually, Druzhnikov’s prolonged participation in underground literary and samizdat networks had provoked retaliation on the part of the Soviet government. By the mid-1980s, the Soviet refusnik writer was detained by the KGB and given the “choice” of imprisonment in a labor camp, or forced confinement in a psychiatric hospital. Once again, sustained pressure on the part of American human rights organizations like U.S. Helsinki Watch, along with public protests of writers such as Kurt Vonnegut (a one-time member of Robert Bernstein’s Fund for Free Expression and the Chair of the AAP committee responsible for organizing the “America through American Eyes” exhibit at the 1979 Moscow Book Fair) and Arthur Miller (a long-time champion of free expression who was a founding member of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee)—as well as Druzhnikov’s

membership in the International PEN Club (which Jeri Laber was responsible for arranging)—was all that kept Druzhnikov from incarceration.26

INTERRUPTION OF POSTAL COMMUNICATION

Another suggestion made by Druzhnikov in his meeting with Laber concerned his willingness to act as a recipient for test mailings of certain articles, magazines, and books sent from the West to the Soviet Union. Beginning in the early 1970s, the United States Postal Service had begun to see a significant increase in the number of complaints it received from U.S. citizens regarding the non-delivery of registered mail sent to the Soviet Union. According to investigations conducted by the United States Postal Service, the number of inquiries concerning registered mail for which the sender had not received confirmation of delivery totaled 2,936 in 1976; 2,859 in 1977; and 2,302 in 1978. Furthermore, the study found that a disproportionate amount of those cases involved letters that were intended for members of the Soviet Jewish community, as well as those Soviet citizens with known affiliations to activist or dissident networks.27

Since 1874, international postal communication had been regulated by the Universal Postal Union, which after 1947, had come to exist as a specialized agency under the auspices of the United Nations. More recently, the ratification of the Constitution of the Universal Postal Union at the Congress of Vienna in 1964, along with its General and Detailed Regulations, had codified the legal framework of modern international postal communication—international agreements that both the United States and the Soviet Union were party to. Within these conventions, it was determined that “a postal item shall remain the property of the sender until it is delivered to the rightful owner, except when

27 125 Cong. Rec. S14324 (1979), HRWR, Series I: Jeri Laber Files, Box 52, Folder 14.
the item had been seized in pursuance of the legislation of the country of destination.” For Soviet Russia, the frequent legal justification for the interference of postal communication was Article 70 of the Criminal Code, which prohibited any “agitation or propaganda carried out with the purpose of undermining or weakening the state,” as well as “the dissemination of libelous fabrications defaming the Soviet government and social system.”

While the matter of postal communication was not explicitly addressed in the Helsinki Final Act, the signatories did declare themselves “conscious of the need for an ever wider knowledge and understanding of the various aspects of life in other participating States,” and had pledged to “make it their aim to facilitate the freer and wider dissemination of information of all kinds, to encourage co-operation in the field of information and the exchange of information with other countries.” Furthermore, because the participating states were obliged through the Final Act to ensure the good faith fulfillment of all existing obligations under international law, the actions taken by the Soviet government to restrict the flow of communication between citizens of Western countries and certain ethnic, religious or political minorities in the Soviet Union seemed to many, to be in clear violation of the spirit—if not the letter—of Helsinki. In their efforts to challenge such behavior, members of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee invoked agreements like the Universal Postal Union, and the obligation to respect international agreements contained in Basket I of the Helsinki Final Act. By relying on the normative authority of these international protocols, the Committee was able to seek arbitration for violation of citizens’ individual rights and freedoms without having to resort to appeals which relied only upon a moral foundation for their legitimacy, and the highly relative, value laden, culturally specific assumptions that necessarily accompanied such claims.

This effort to tie the protection of individual rights to a more full and forthright implementation of states’ Helsinki obligations was a theme that was repeatedly stressed by the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee. In an interview given to the émigré dissident journal A Chronicle of Human Rights in the USSR in the spring of 1979, shortly after the establishment

29 “Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe Final Act.”
of U.S. Helsinki Watch, Robert Bernstein articulated what he believed to be the central mission of his new organization. Bernstein stressed the importance of human rights to greater global security and stability, and the unquestionable value that communication across international and ideological boundaries had for the maintenance of an international dialogue that could support such a goal, saying “the American Helsinki Watch believes that the foundation of international cooperation depends on each nation giving its own citizens the basic rights that make trusting and meaningful exchanges between both individuals and nations possible.” “The Helsinki Final Act,” Bernstein continued, “if observed, provides a framework for such cooperation.”

For Bernstein, “trusting and meaningful exchanges” demanded that governments respect citizens’ freedom to share ideas and information, particularly since meaningful, in-person contact between members of his organization and dissidents inside the Soviet Union was exceedingly difficult in the first several months of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee’s existence. In his interview with the Chronicle, Bernstein lamented the “difficulty of corresponding with citizens in some countries,” and expressed his belief that his organization would be a failure unless frequent contact between all other Helsinki monitoring groups could be maintained. For this reason, the campaign to bring public attention to the Soviet interruption of postal communication became one of the very first projects taken up by the U.S. Helsinki Watch’s Subcommittee on the Free Flow of People and Ideas.

The challenge before the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee was to devise a strategy for publicizing the Soviets’ interruption of postal communication in a way that could most effectively utilize the strengths of the nascent organization, while at the same time, continue to fulfill the group’s core mission of helping to improve the lives of real people subjected to governmental persecution. By the end of 1979, the Committee had outlined a proposal to conduct a series of test mailings targeting specific individuals throughout the Soviet Union and other Eastern European states, in order to systematically evaluate the incidence of non-delivery in various socialist countries. These mailings would be sent via

31 Ibid., 51.
32 See Letter to Winthrop Knowlton from Jeri Laber, 2 July 1979, HRWR, Series I: Jeri Laber Files, Box 52, Folder 5.
registered international mail, and a record of their delivery would be tracked through their returned receipts. In a clear signal of the Committee’s intention to frame their campaign against the Soviet’s interruption of postal communication, not as a plea to defend the fundamental human rights of Soviet citizens, but as a violation of international protocol and, by extension, the Helsinki Final Act, U.S. Helsinki Watch public statements accompanying the mailing project were careful to describe the group’s efforts as an attempt to “test [Soviet] compliance with the Universal Postal Convention.” These statements went on to declare that a record of this compliance would then be transmitted to the delegations participating in the Madrid CSCE Review Conference, taking place later that year.

The list of Soviet and Eastern European participants included citizens from Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the USSR. Of the twenty-one individuals chosen, the overwhelming majority had been members of their own country’s Helsinki monitoring organizations themselves. By selecting these citizens to serve as the recipients of these mailings, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee brought greater visibility to the challenges facing Helsinki monitoring and the ability of citizens to “know and act upon” their rights. As for individuals such as Yuri Druzhnikov—who was one of the first to agree to participate in these test mailings, and who was instrumental in providing the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee with the names and addresses of other Soviet dissidents willing to take part—the approach taken enabled the U.S. Helsinki Watch to further publicize the personalized impact of Soviet human rights violations to their American audiences, and demonstrate the way that these practices affected the everyday lives of individual Soviet citizens.

U.S. Helsinki Watch records indicate that, from the outset of the mailing project, the Committee had attempted to frame the Soviet government’s interference with postal communication in a way that would most highlight the practice’s detrimental influence on other areas of East-West cooperation. Evidence for this can be found in correspondence between Robert Bernstein and Free Flow Subcommittee member Jeri Laber. In a letter written in the summer of 1979, Laber reminded the Chairman of the subcommittee’s

35 Ibid.
intention to undertake the mailing project, and alluded to efforts made by subcommittee members to contact and solicit information from the private scientist and psychiatric organizations with which the U.S. Helsinki Watch regularly liaised. These requests sought any documentary evidence that these group’s could provide, which detailed incidence of interrupted or unanswered correspondence between their organization’s members and Soviet counterparts or officials in the East. The U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee intended to use these reports to compel professional organizations to speak out in protest of such obstruction, by articulating the extent to which this discriminatory practice served as an impediment to cross-cultural progress in their field.\(^{37}\)

As a long-time employee of the Association of American Publishers with extensive experience in dealing with the Soviet literary establishment, Laber was tasked with compiling a report detailing the disruption of postal communication in the publishing world. In her letter, Laber asked Bernstein whether he could suggest any other professional fields that would be appropriate for the group to contact in addition to the organizations she had proposed, and requested his assistance as the CEO of Random House, in compiling evidence for her own publisher’s report on the interruption of postal communication. “As the individual who has probably sent more unanswered mail to Soviet officials than anyone,” Laber told Bernstein, “it would be good if you went through your files and compiled a list for us. I suspect you’ll come up with quite a dossier.”\(^{38}\)

These tactics used by the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee to link the disruption of postal communication to the violation of existing international protocols such as the Universal Postal Union, and by extension, to charges of obstruction in other fields of East-West cooperation contributed to a conceptual shift taking place in American conceptions of human rights in the 1970s and 80s. Appeals such as these helped to bring considerations for human rights from a place of somewhat vague and sweeping idealistic generalities, to one where their defense could be articulated through a much more granular and tangible understanding of what the protection of such rights actually entailed. This shift was one of individual empowerment, and personal involvement, and comported with the provision called for in the Helsinki Final Act for individuals to “know and act upon” their rights.

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\(^{37}\) Letter to Robert Bernstein from Jeri Laber, 2 July 1979, HRWR, Series I: Jeri Laber Files, Box 52, Folder 5.

\(^{38}\) Ibid.
The early advocacy campaigns of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee encouraged such a shift by articulating much more seemingly concrete and achievable solutions for the resolution of a particular human rights concern than that which had previously been on offer by other human rights organizations such as Amnesty International. While many Americans at this time no doubt supported the advancement of human rights inside the Soviet Union in theory, there were limited avenues available to them as individual citizens in which they could constructively contribute to these desired outcomes. These early U.S. Helsinki Watch campaigns are important because they provided Americans with alternative frameworks for thinking about the “transactional value” of human rights compliance.

THE CONFERENCE ON SOVIET-AMERICAN EXCHANGE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee’s strategy of using detailed information concerning abuses provided by dissidents across transnational networks to target members of a professional community—particularly those American professionals who had some kind of ongoing relationship to the Soviet Union—sought to more directly tie individuals’ willingness to cooperate in economic, technological, scientific, and cultural exchanges with the Soviets’ observation of human rights protections for its own citizens. The Committee saw such “moral linkage” as an effective way to raise awareness among American scientists, academics, artists, business professionals and others concerning the importance of human rights in the East-West relationship. Encouraging American professionals to raise human rights concerns when travelling to the USSR had been a practice of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committees since its very inception. Now, a year into the organization’s existence, U.S. Helsinki Watch began taking steps to formalize those efforts.

By the beginning of 1980, in the midst of the organization’s ongoing publicity campaigns, and with ever-widening contact across transnational activist networks providing a steady stream of information on the Soviet infringement of citizens’ rights, the

U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee took steps to reinforce their strategy of “moral linkage” by convening a conference whose goal was to help individuals and private organizations in the United States respond constructively to the broad range of human rights violations taking place within the USSR. U.S. Helsinki Watch argued that the Soviets’ violation of the humanitarian provisions agreed to at Helsinki had a real and lasting impact on the rest of the cross-cultural cooperation stipulated by the Final Act, and worked with different nongovernmental actors to develop and communicate ways in which these private American citizens could express their displeasure through the course of their various international exchanges.  

Importantly, while these efforts did, to some extent, seek to educate American citizens about the restrictions and deprivations experienced by Soviet citizens, the primary function of the conference was to stress the limitations placed on foreigners in the context of these international exchanges, and to emphasize the impediment that these practices posed for Western interests. This strategy of framing the Soviet violation of the Helsinki Final Act in terms of its impact on Western actors was just one more way in which the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee sought to persuade American audiences to more directly identify with the consequences of Soviet disregard for these international agreements and, by extension, human rights.  

The conference, which was held in April 1980 and hosted by the Ford Foundation, was intended to be a forum in which American professionals from a variety of different fields could meet to discuss the problems they encountered as a result of the “closed nature” of Soviet society in the course of their international exchanges. The conference’s discussion centered around several case studies commissioned by the Committee, which highlighted different approaches taken by Western organizations toward various recent intercultural events. The exchanges under examination included the World Psychiatric Congress held in Moscow in 1973 and Hawaii in 1977; the International Congress of Mathematicians held in Vancouver in 1975 and Helsinki in 1978; American Bar Association’s delegation to Moscow in 1979; and the Second International Moscow Book Fair held in September 1979, which Jeri Laber had attended. In addition to these events,

41 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
administrative organizations responsible for arranging such exchanges were also invited to provide details of their experiences for use as the basis for further discussion. These organizations included the National Academy of Sciences; the Citizen Exchange Corps; the Dartmouth Conference for Writers; the United Nations Association; the International Research and Exchange Board; and the U.S.-USSR Trade and Economic Council. It was also from these same organizations that many of the participants for the conference were selected.\footnote{Ibid.; “Memorandum from Andy Sommer to Jeri Laber concerning the Results of the Planning Meeting for the Conference to Develop Human Rights Guidelines for International Meetings and Exchanges, January 13, 1980,” 15 January 1980, HRWR, Series I: Jeri Laber Files, Box 46, Folder 3; Letter to Robert McKay from Andy Sommer, 12 February 1980, HRWR, Series I: Jeri Laber Files, Box 46, Folder 3.}

To ensure that the case studies followed a standardized format that would be useful for their purposes, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee had prepared a questionnaire that was meant to address the central issues that were to be addressed at the conference. This questionnaire asked respondents broadly about the nature and duration of their personal or organizational contact with representatives of the Soviet state, and inquired as to whether any attempts had been made to establish preconditions for American participation prior to their visit to the USSR. If so, Committee members wished to know whether such preconditions had been effective. The questionnaire focused particularly on problems that arose regarding to access to information, access to the press or citizens of the Soviet Union, or other areas related to the free movement of people or information—all issues that pertained specifically to the Helsinki Final Act’s agreements on cooperation in humanitarian fields. Finally, the questionnaire sought to determine whether the participant had any knowledge of any Soviet citizen who was denied their right to participate in the exchange, or whether any other issue pertaining to human rights had been raised in the course of their visit.\footnote{U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee, “Questionnaire for Case Studies on International Meetings and Exchanges,” n.d., HRWR, Series I: Jeri Laber Files, Box 46, Folder 3.}

By examining these recent exchanges in this way, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee hoped to provide American citizens with alternative negotiating strategies for engaging the Soviets on matters concerning internationally recognized human rights protections. Discussions within the U.S. Helsinki Watch Subcommittee on Liaisons with Professional Organizations reflected the belief that many American groups were completely unprepared
to constructively confront the Soviets on such issues, and would benefit from a forum in which they could share their common experiences and propose ways to make concern for human rights a more central part of the process of East-West exchange. Helsinki Watch members also hoped that this conference would help reinforce procedures for those individuals who wished to raise the issue of human rights in their exchanges, but who lacked the institutional support of their professional organization.46

By the time the Conference on Soviet-American Exchanges and Human Rights was held, the need for individual citizens to be effective in voicing their objections to Soviet behavior had become more pressing than ever. Only a few months earlier, U.S.-Soviet relations began rapidly deteriorating after the Soviet Army invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 to try and prop up the rule of the Soviet-allied government in Kabul. A month later, security forces inside the USSR moved against the human rights leader Andrei Sakharov, placing him under arrest and promptly banishing him without trial to the restricted city of Gorky. The fallout from these actions on the part of the United States had been swift and severe—particularly in areas where pressure could be most immediately applied, such as cultural, scientific, economic, and technological fields. In their letter of invitation to participants of the conference, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee spoke of the urgent need to establish procedures for U.S. private citizens when dealing with the Soviets, “in light of the politicization of virtually every aspect of Soviet-American relations” as a result of these recent actions.47 These efforts by the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee to stress the direct link between economic, scientific and cultural cooperation amongst Eastern and Western societies and continued progress in the humanitarian fields prefigured a return to the heightened ideological tension of the late Cold War, when this type of linkage became more widely adopted within certain specialized American professional communities, and even on occasion, was implemented as a tool of American foreign policy with respect to the communist bloc.48

48 Perhaps the most high profile example of such linkage can be seen in President Carter’s decision to boycott the 1980 Moscow Olympics. While the primary motivation behind this action may have been the Soviet’s actions in Afghanistan, there was undeniably a human rights dimension to this decision. See Nicholas Evan
CONCLUSIONS

Upon its formation, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee had gone to great lengths to defend its legitimacy as an organization that could justifiably pursue the monitoring and improvement of other states’ Helsinki records. In an internal Helsinki Watch memo drafted less than a month after the formal creation of the organization, former Moscow correspondent and one-time U.S. Helsinki Commission staff member Alfred Friendly Jr. summarized the challenges that faced the nascent organization, when he explained to his subcommittee chairman—the former Minnesota congressman Donald Fraser—his view that “the enduring problem of the Watch is to reconcile its identity as an American citizens’ pressure group with its goal of promoting international compliance with standards Americans honor and others dispute.” In order to overcome this contradiction, the group adopted an advocacy strategy that would frame for their audience—to as great an extent as possible—the transnational character of their Helsinki monitoring, and the degree to which such violations of human rights by the Soviet Union impacted not just those citizens whose rights were denied, but all people, and the very basis of international cooperation.

In its Declaration of Principles Guiding Relations between Participating States, the Helsinki Final Act explicitly sanctioned a private individual to “know and act upon his rights and duties” with respect to a state’s provision of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Similarly, the Declaration of Principles confirmed that “institutions, organizations, and persons have a relevant and positive role to play in contributing to the achievement of . . . good neighborly relations among [states], international peace, security, and justice” in the context of those states’ ongoing mutual cooperation. The U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee took seriously this obligation, and embraced its responsibility to monitor Helsinki compliance in a manner that could most effectively reconcile their organization’s

Sarantakes, Dropping the Torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and the Cold War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). For a wider analysis of the influence that private citizen’s advocacy had on the course of U.S.-Soviet relations throughout the 1980s, see Matthew Evangelista, Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).


50 “Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe Final Act.”

51 Ibid.
somewhat contradictory status as a Western NGO concerned with the behavior of Eastern European and Soviet governments.

The strategies of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee that resulted from such an approach helped to shift the locus of social and political pressure in American society for Soviet human rights reforms beyond the instruments of official, state-to-state interactions, and instead tied those protections more directly to the process of nongovernmental cooperation between societies generally. These campaigns directly called into question the morality of continued cultural exchange with a government whose disregard for its own international commitments violated principles central to American’s system of values. But they made a concerted effort to do so in a practical fashion, quantifying the Soviet’s repressive practices in terms of the adverse impact such behavior had on the process of cross-cultural exchange in question. By calling upon professional elites within American civil society—scientists, academics, and businessmen—to express their displeasure with such behaviors by withholding further participation in those areas of exchange, this “moral linkage” reinforced the transnational quality of this moment in human rights history, by empowering the citizenry of a state to have a more direct say in determining the conditions under which future cross-cultural relationships would be conducted, and allowing Western actors existing outside the traditional international normative framework to more effectively appeal for the cessation of specific human right abuses.
CONCLUSIONS

The Moscow Helsinki Group and the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee both took shape as nongovernmental organizations within their respective countries in the aftermath of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act. Both groups considered it their mission to see the humanitarian articles of the Helsinki Final Act upheld and implemented, but despite this common goal, the conditions that brought both these organizations into existence could hardly be more different. The founding members of the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee had enjoyed active support and assistance from their own government, and occupied positions of prominence within their professional and social communities. The founding members of the Moscow Helsinki Group, on the other hand, were social outcasts by comparison and subject to near constant harassment and persecution by the state. Far from utilizing their occupational opportunities for the advancement of their activism, these individuals had, in many cases, been dismissed from their jobs as a consequence of their involvement with human rights work and targeted by the KGB through surveillance, intimidation and even assault.

In addition to the distinct social and political environments in which these groups were created and operated, there also existed fundamental differences between these organizations’ methodological approaches to their Helsinki advocacy. While the Moscow Helsinki Group sought to monitor the Helsinki compliance of its own government through the collection and dissemination of personal testimonies provided by Soviet citizens, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee made the publication of other states’ Helsinki records its primary area of focus. These two highly divergent sets of circumstances have led some scholars to conclude that, as nongovernmental organizations, the Moscow Helsinki Group and the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee were not able to reconcile their contrasting rhetoric and tactics within a single model of transnational human rights advocacy.

Yet despite the myriad factors that differentiated these two organizations, the fact that they were able to coordinate their activity and even collaborate to the degree that they did tells us something important about this moment in human rights history. While the Helsinki Final Act was not the first international agreement to have addressed the notion of
individual rights, the unique structure of the CSCE follow up process provided participating states with a previously unavailable opportunity to make concern for a state’s domestic human rights record a legitimate matter of international relations. Furthermore, this newly articulated area of international accountability was set forth within the context of a larger comprehensive economic, technological and security agreement between Eastern, Western, and non-aligned states. It was this implicit linkage between the humanitarian provisions of the Final Act and these other areas of interstate cooperation that helped situate the Helsinki process as a potentially profound force for change within existing Cold War relations.

However, the signing of the Final Act merely set the stage for such change, as the ultimate impact of the Helsinki process was by no means guaranteed at the time of the summit’s conclusion. Rather, it was the efforts of nongovernmental organizations in the years that followed which helped to pressure states to respect this linkage in the course of their official relations. But more than just an object of political decorum to be observed by governments, these groups sought to stress the central place that human rights had in the lives of everyday citizens. This too comported with the language of the Final Act, which asserted the responsibility of individuals to know and act upon their rights and duties with respect to the agreement’s humanitarian articles, as well as confirmed the positive role that private citizens were considered capable of playing when contributing to overall cooperation and improved relations between societies.

The text of the Final Act provided these nongovernmental organizations with a common transnational normative framework—to be equally and unreservedly applied among participating states—that standardized notions of human rights, and specified the obligations and duties of both state and non-state actors alike. In addition to their lobbying of participating governments, these organizations worked to affirm this framework by engaging with the broader international public through the process of increased cross-cultural cooperation called for in Final Act. International events such as book fairs, professional conferences, scientific forums, and even the CSCE follow up meetings themselves provided a common transnational space in which these groups could make their voices heard, and advance their calls for the protection of human rights. Furthermore, these groups utilized a common transnational discursive field to transmit
this message—newspapers, reports, and studies—that enabled them to communicate directly with private individuals for the purposes of furthering greater global understanding of the challenges facing this new transnational mandate.

In this way, nongovernmental Helsinki monitoring organizations were able to free themselves from a reliance on the state-centric enforcement paradigm, in which a government or international organization was considered the ultimate arbiter of reform for human rights. No longer would these organizations have to content themselves with simply lobbying for the inclusion of human rights protections within the context of a government’s international relations. Instead, under the new normative framework established by the Final Act and embraced by Helsinki monitoring groups, activists could now work to directly alter a state’s behavior through the application of their own endogenous pressure—exerted through the direct empowerment of nongovernmental actors within the functioning of a global society.

With the benefit of hindsight, transnational Helsinki advocacy networks of the late 1970s and early 80s can be regarded as having played a major contributive role in laying the seeds of the post-Cold War efflorescence in nongovernmental human rights activism in areas around the globe. Organizations like the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee helped to delineate models of human rights advocacy that could be easily adopted by individual citizens and organizations, irrespective of the particular target government or the nature of the reform in question. The success of Helsinki Watch and its ultimate incorporation into the globally influential organization Human Rights Watch by the late 1980s is a testament to this model’s efficacy and adaptability. Yet in today’s world, as populist and nationalist sentiments gain increasing popularity within long-standing liberal democratic societies such as the United States and Western Europe, we must question the long-term viability of this model of transnational human rights activism. New challenges, such as mass migration, global climate change, and continued technological disruption exert unfamiliar pressures on the ideological foundations central to the advocacy strategies described in this thesis, and perhaps even risk undermining the individual’s faith in the power and propriety of transnational human rights themselves.
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