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Review by **Sean Brennan**, University of Scranton

One of the better-known stories of the later period of the Cold War is the era of détente, from the Nixon through the Carter administrations, roughly from 1969 to 1979. The highpoint of this period occurred during the final years of the Nixon administration and the brief Ford administrations, culminating in the Helsinki Accords of 1975. With this event, the American government simultaneously recognized the permanent division of Europe between the capitalist West and the Communist East, and also held out the hope for increased trade and a relaxing of tensions on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Nevertheless, the traditional hostility of the American government to the communist regimes of the "captive nations" of Eastern Europe remained consistently in the background. Détente marked a shifting of tactics in the Cold War, not a serious discussion about ending the Cold War itself.

A new documentary collection from the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, volume E-15, Part 1, sheds further light on the complicated diplomatic maneuverings of the American government with the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe in the early to mid-1970s. The collection consists of 105 documents, emerging from an impressive diversity of sources, from the archives of the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Nixon and Ford presidential libraries, among others. Relations between the United States and the two critical Soviet satellites of Poland and the German Democratic Republic as well as the semi-independent Communist regimes of Romania and Yugoslavia compose the bulk of the document collection, although Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Albania receive very limited attention in documents concerned with Eastern Europe as a whole.

Characterized by the détente of the Nixon and Ford administrations as well as West German chancellor Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, the early to mid-1970s marked a renewal of contact between the leading Western powers and the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe,

after almost two decades of mutual isolation. Under the shadow of the collapse of South Vietnam and the Watergate scandal, the American government badly desired a fresh approach regarding relations with the Communist governments on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain. For their part, the governments in Belgrade, Warsaw, Bucharest, and East Berlin (in the last case after Walter Ulbricht was replaced by Erich Honecker) seemed eager for closer ties as well. As the documents from all sections of the collection attest, the Nixon and Ford administrations, personified by National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, actively desired closer economic ties with and extensive trade between the United States and Eastern Europe. The majority of the documents in volume E-15, Part 1 are devoted to the issue of the expansion of trade, in particular attempts by Romania and Poland to acquire of Most-Favored-Nation (MFN) status, requests for American loans, and the opening of Eastern European markets to American manufactured goods.

Despite the eagerness of the State Department, Kissinger in particular, to establish a new, more productive relationship, the documents assembled in the collection reveal a slowly developing process, even with respect to the three countries, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia, where the American government was most hopeful about expanding economic, cultural, political, and (in the case of Yugoslavia) military ties. Despite the very cordial meetings between Communist leaders such as Edvard Gierek and Nicolae Ceaucescu and Presidents Nixon and Ford, lingering suspicion continued to characterize their relations. For example, document 70 contains the minutes of a meeting between Henry Kissinger and Yugoslav Prime Minister Dzemal Bijedic in Belgrade on November 4 1974. Kissinger notes that expanded military and economic cooperation between the United States and Yugoslavia was certainly possible, but "reoccurring violent speeches" about the American government by Yugoslavian politicians prevented this from happening. Likewise, in document 55, US Ambassador to Poland Richard Davies sent a telegram to the State Department regarding the angry complaints he received from Polish leader Edvard Gierek concerning Radio Free Europe's description of the riots in Warsaw which followed the government's decision to raise food prices in July 1976.[1]

Interestingly, despite the desire for better relations with the 'captive nations' of Eastern Europe, the American government expanded operations for both Radio Free Europe and Voice of America during this time period. For example, document 18 is a memorandum sent by NSA Brent Scowcroft to the National Security Council which discusses extensively how to expand and improve upon the work of American broadcasting facilities in Eastern Europe. Likewise, document 102 is a presidential order sent from Gerald Ford to the National Security Council, dated August 13 1976, wherein Ford authorizes the Army to continue its intelligence gathering activities in West Berlin, including extensive (although supervised) use of wiretapping. Neither was the expansion of trade between the United States and Eastern Europe done in the interests of relieving Cold War tensions. Document 24, dated January 19 1977, an inter-agency study of East-West economic relations, states quite clearly that the overriding goal of expanded trade was to make the Eastern European

[1] Detailed memorably in Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

countries less economically dependent on the Soviet Union, at a time when, according to various military intelligence estimates contained in the collection, the Warsaw Pact forces were increasing their conventional military strength in Europe.

Unsurprisingly, relations between Yugoslavia and the United States appear to be the most cordial and productive in these documents, harkening back to attempts by the American government during the Tito-Stalin split to promote Yugoslavian independence from Soviet control. An excellent example of this is document 60. Dated July 5 1973, it is a joint policy paper from the Departments of State and Defense, which discusses the expansion of arms sales to Yugoslavia, and the fact that a number of officers from the Yugoslavian army were currently attending military academies in the United States. Improved relations with Romania, which had been attempting to break away from Soviet influence since Ceaucescu's rise to power in 1964 and Poland, which had a more troubled relationship with the USSR than any other Soviet satellite, proceeded at a slightly slower pace, but by 1976 resulted in the granting of MFN status as well as generous American loans to both countries, although nothing close in scope to the military ties then emerging with Yugoslavia. The membership of Poland and Romania in the Warsaw Pact precluded this possibility, although it was briefly discussed by the Romanian and American defense ministries on July 30 1975 (Document 35).

Given the still not entirely resolved status of Berlin and Germany itself between the victorious powers of the Second World War, relations between the United States and East Germany remained quite limited, despite the official recognition of the German Democratic Republic by Washington, which is detailed extensively in documents 84, 87, and 88. According to many of the other documents in the section devoted to US-East German relations, officials from the Nixon and Ford administrations believed the expansion of economic ties with East Germany would have to wait until tensions surrounding Berlin had died down completely, and that nothing should be done that would jeopardize the Western powers' "special position" in West Berlin. The documents in the collection also reveal that the tendency of American presidential administrations in the 1950s and 1960s to treat the GDR as a mere appendage of the Soviet Union, and the belief that negotiations on the "German question" should involve Moscow, as opposed to East Berlin, persisted well into the 1970s as well.[2]

Although there are no shattering revelations in this documentary collection, volume E-15, Part 1, is still a valuable contribution to our understanding of the complicated, often contradictory nature of détente during the 1970s. Although relations between the United States and some of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe improved, the shadow of the Cold War and conflict between communism and capitalism never quite dissipated. Therefore, the rather rapid end to détente and a return to Cold War tensions in the late 1970s and early 1980s should not be seen as a great surprise.

[2] The best depiction of this process remains Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

Sean Brennan is assistant professor of history at the University of Scranton. He is interested in political, diplomatic, and religious history of Central and Eastern Europe. His book, *The Politics of Religion in Soviet-Occupied Germany: The Case of Berlin-Brandenburg 1945-1949* was just published by Lexington Books. His next project will concern the Soviet occupation of Austria.