

Q. Mr. President, I'd like to explore a little more deeply our relationship with the Russians. They used to brag back in Khrushchev's day that because of their greater patience and because of our greed for business deals that they would sooner or later get the better of us. Is it possible that, despite some setbacks in the Middle East, they've proved their point?

Ford: . . . And if we turn to Helsinki — I'm glad you raised it, Mr. Frankel. In the case of Helsinki, 35 nations signed an agreement, including the secretary of state for the Vatican. I can't under any circumstances believe that the His Holiness the Pope would agree by signing that agreement that the 35 nations have turned over to the Warsaw Pact nations the domination of Eastern Europe. It just isn't true. And if Mr. Carter alleges that His Holiness by signing that has done it, he is totally inaccurate. Now, what has been accomplished by the Helsinki agree-

ment? Number One, we have an agreement where they notify us and we notify them of any military maneuvers that are to be undertaken. They have done it in both cases where they've done so. There is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and there never will be under a Ford administration.

Q: Did I understand you to say, sir, that the Russians are not using Eastern Europe as their own sphere of influence in occupying most of the countries there and making sure with their troops that it's a Communist zone, whereas on our side of the line, the Italians and the French are still flirting with the Communists.

Ford: I don't believe, Mr. Frankel, that the Yugoslavians consider themselves dominated by the Soviet Union. I don't believe the Romanians consider themselves dominated by the Soviet Union. I don't believe that the Poles consider themselves dominated by the Soviet Union. Each of those countries is independent, autonomous. It has its own territorial integrity. And the United States does not concede that those countries are under the dominance of the Soviet

Union. As a matter of fact, I visited Poland, Yugoslavia and Romania to make certain that the people of those countries understood that the president of the United States and the people of the United States are dedicated to their independence, their autonomy and their freedom. . . .

Carter: Well, in the first place, I'm not criticizing His Holiness the Pope. I was talking about Mr. Ford. The fact is that secrecy has surrounded the decisions made by the Ford administration. In the case of the Helsinki agreement, it may have been a good agreement, at the beginning, but we have failed to enforce the so-called Basket Three part, which insures the right of people to migrate, join their families, be free, speak out. The Soviet Union is still jamming Radio Free Europe. Radio Free Europe is being jammed. We have also seen a very serious problem with the so-called Sonnenfeldt document, which apparently Mr. Ford has just endorsed, which said that there is an organic linkage between the Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union, and I would like to see Mr. Ford convince the Polish-Americans and the Czech-Americans and the Hungarian-Americans in this country that those countries don't live under the domination and the supervision of the Soviet Union behind the Iron Curtain.



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AT ANOTHER STAGE, Carter compared Ford's position on unemployment to Karl Marx's argument that the free enterprise system could prosper only in wartime or preparation for war. "I don't agree with that statement," Carter said with notable piousness, "I hope Mr. Ford doesn't either."

But the Democrat did not have a monopoly on ventures into the absurd. Defending the Helsinki agreement, Ford pointed out that the Vatican was one of the signatories and, with much headshaking, added that he simply could not "under any circumstances believe that His Holiness the Pope" would be a dupe for the Communists.

In practical terms, the most serious misstep of the debate was Ford's suggestion that Eastern Europeans are free of Soviet dominance, which contradicts the consensus of the so-called ethnic neighborhoods that are the prime battleground in such critical industrial states as Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

The President could have gotten away with mentioning Romania and Yugoslavia but he added Poland as one of these countries who are "independent, autonomous" and possessed of "territorial integrity."

IN THE POLITICAL code, the mention of Poland suggests much more of Eastern Europe, and Carter was quick to seize on the point. "I would like to see Mr. Ford convince the Polish-Americans and the Czech-Americans and the Hungarian-Americans in this country," he said, "that those countries don't live under the domination and supervision of the Soviet Union behind the Iron Curtain."

The political ramifications of the Ford comments cannot be assessed immediately. Much obviously will depend on the skill the Democrats show in exploiting the opening over the next few days. But what is instantly apparent is that the misstep did nothing to reinforce Ford's reputation as the surefooted candidate on foreign policy. And that alone is more than the Carter strategists had hoped to achieve last night.

However that comes out, what Carter clearly did achieve last night was the projection of himself as a candidate capable of taking charge against an incumbent president — and as a candidate determined to make his own issues the focus as he did by repeatedly returning to the unemployment figures on the most fragile pretexts.

That is something Democrats who have been uncertain about this strange candidate of theirs can understand and appreciate. And that alone changes the psychology of the situation once again.

The campaign still has almost a month to run. And, based on what has happened so far, several twists and turns can be expected before the voters make their decision Nov. 2. But for today, at least, the tide is running with Jimmy Carter.