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Correspondence

Of Solzhenitsyn and Shopping Lists

To the Editors: In "Solzhenitsyn, Detente, and Helsinki" (Excursus, September) James Finn eloquently criticizes the inept and deplorable way in which the Ford Administration has addressed the issues of human rights and international politics raised by Alexander Solzhenitsyn. However, assessing the balance of benefits of détente for the Soviet Union and for the United States, Finn lists a number of items of benefit to the form. "And for the U.S.? That shopping list is very short." Nothing else is said.

Peace. It is often easy to forget that this is the chief benefit of détente—a public good for many to enjoy, not just for one country or, if you will, a "good" in itself. Surely we do not want one side to gain far more than the other—and I, for one, readily join in criticizing the procedures and the substance of the Helsinki affair. But all too often we tend to forget what détente is principally about. That is to make a safer world for our children. And the world is already safer for my daughters than when I was their age (1948, 1951).

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To the Editors: What James Finn failed to underline adequately in "Solzhenitsyn, Détente, and Helsinki" was the probable role of Secretary Kissinger in the foolishness President Ford weaved himself into when Solzhenitsyn came calling on America.

In all likelihood the Secretary's guidelines and instructions on the proprieties of official treatment for the expelled writer-moralist were Ford's marching orders. And it seems that Kissinger's advice had deeper roots than a wish not to lend another platform for further undermining of an increasingly shallow and fragile détente policy. Apparently in one of his off-the-record face-to-face chats the Secretary had promised the Kremlin leadership not to cause them embarrassment by trumpeting Solzhenitsyn's blasts and prophecies. In attempting to implement this highly questionable overture Kissinger was willing to risk further muddying of President Ford's image in hopes of securing his personal credibility with Secretary Brezhnev. The result, of course, was embarrassment for all. All this adds up to poor policies and politics for sure, but is of little consequence—except for what it tells about Kissinger's manner of thinking and operating.

If these only partially confirmed speculations are true, then the Solzhenitsyn incident should further call into question Secretary Kissinger's usually illusory *modus vivendum*. His personal "diplomacy" has been carried to a degree that borders on the intolerably dangerous. From his mistaken and brutal policies in Southeast Asia, to his acceptance of the October summons to Moscow and the subsequent, still unexplained, "nuclear alert," to his latest good-looking but clearly temporary Middle East "miracle," he has personalized American foreign policy beyond all prudent standards.

Rather than a true structure of lasting peace, we have many patchwork agreements, all threatening to unravel slowly or all at once. The degree of actual direction and stability in our foreign policy has rarely been less—George Meany may have a point when he indicates that American foreign policy is made each morning when Secretary Kissinger awakes. Our foreign policy now seems all things to all sides. And this comes from a secretary whose Bureau of Public Affairs at the State Department claims to be seeking a real two-way dialogue with various sectors of the public interested in foreign policy, not to mention the Congress, which can lead us to a new consensus on American responsibilities in world affairs.

In 1973 the then Senator William Fulbright, himself quite challengeable on so much of what he advocates, perceptively warned of Kissinger's ways. The Secretary clearly did not get the message. And so it is worth repeating.

"A skillful diplomacy can, of course, take account of domestic developments, but here we are thrown back upon the cleverness of statesmen—a commodity hardly to be relied upon. And that indeed is the root weakness of the game of nations; it is a despotism without laws, as stable or shaky, just or unjust, as the men momentarily at the top of the heap. In international relations, as within our own country, stability requires institutions; it requires a system that ordinary men can run and incompetent men cannot ruin. Guarantee if you can that the game will be played by a Bismarck or Talleyrand, by a Kissinger or Le Duc Tho, perhaps I will withdraw my objections. But as long as luminaries give way to lesser lights—and they always do—the objection stands. As Henry Kissinger once wrote of Prince Bismarck, 'In the hands of others lacking his subtle touch, his methods led to the collapse of the nineteenth century state system. The nemesis of power is that, except in the hands of a master, reliance on it is more likely to produce a contest of arms than of self-restraint.'"

Mark A. Bruzonsky
Washington, D.C.

James Finn Responds:

If Jorge Domínguez is correct in saying that the world is safer now than it was (1948, 1951) because of detente, then détente is sufficiently justified. But the basis for his statement is not clear to all of us, and I am not persuaded that it is so.

I am not opposed to détente but to exaggerated claims for what it has produced. Part of my fears are expressed in Mark Bruzonsky's letter. Much of our foreign policy has been too heavily personalized and depends too heavily on a faith that neither Mr. Kissinger or his policies will soon unravel.