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** The surnames are listed in alphabetical order.*

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BOOK REVIEW

Michael Cotey Morgan

The Final Act: The Helsinki Accords and the Transformation of the Cold War

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021, ISBN: 9780691176062, 424 PP., Price: \$35.00)

A world without war is the decisive goal of humankind, but only in a hypothetical state. Starting from the groundwork that the best peace is war, the great powers are in perpetual competition and confrontation, with the precise purpose of winning and dominating. In this regard, the Cold War era illustrates, probably the best, the aspirations and the struggle of the great powers to become the hegemon of the international political system.

The Cold War was the name given to the period between the end of the Second World War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union; it was a geopolitical rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union and, moreover, an ideological confrontation for global influence and leadership. Even though there was no military clash between these two superpowers, the permanent risk of a nuclear war asks for round table negotiation.

Hence, the Helsinki Accords are an essential feature, not only for the mentioned period but also for the history of the international relations discipline. Due to these reasons, this book aims to provide the inside story regarding this crucial assembly. The author succeeded in presenting the facts and personalities in an effortless manner for the reader.

Although the amount of information is considerable, the structure of the book is approachable as divided into seven chapters

along with an epilogue. After a brief introduction, in which Morgan describes the grounds in writing this book and the general frame of it, the reader is subtly introduced to the reality of those rough times. Moreover, the author manages to reflect the image of that international system, one of the divided worlds in terms of ideology and economic approach, not to mention that Europe of two: East and West, into so called *crises of legitimacy* (chapter 1).

Back then, both United States and USSR faced internal problems in promoting their vision of the world; these two *superpowers* lacked the unity of the systems that they had established and the author, based on the facts, concludes that “the superpowers now sought to understand each other, cooperate across the Iron Curtain and reach agreement on the rules that would govern their relations and their conduct in the world” (p.23).

Another significant moment that Morgan neared is the crucial year of 1969 (chapter 2). In that year, an entirely new class of Cold War leaders assumed power: Richard Nixon in the United States, Georges Pompidou in France, and Willy Brandt in West Germany, as well as Leonid Brezhnev, who seized the entire Soviet power. This chapter carefully analyzes the political activities of those who have made possible the negotiations and the signing documents of the *Final Act*.

The third and fourth chapters cope with the talks for the assembly to take place designed in Multilateral Preparatory Talks (MPT). "The preparatory talks opened in an atmosphere of optimism and unease" (p. 111), stated Morgan, who describes the entire process of negotiations and the art of compromise. The reader will find out that consensus in international politics is tough to accomplish. The Helsinki Accords are such an example. The ideological divergences, also within the Eastern and Western blocks, along with the political contradictions, illustrated the difficulty of reconciliation between those thirty-five signatory states.

The last part of the book is established around the catchphrase: *the East needed the West more than the West needed the East* (p. 145). Indeed, there were several disagreements among the actors involved on this security accord but, it is hard to specify which part of the world needed these accords the most. It is crucial that every government, in the end, finally understood that times are changing, the world is under constant transformation, and every citizen should have a minimum of freedom guaranteed, together with economic access to basics needs.

These were critical points on the agenda, especially for those closed societies where for decades the term *freedom* was ineffable; of course, the Helsinki Accords did not change everything, and it could not do this but, it was a massive victory for those who believed in change and rapprochement. These features are successfully put forward by Morgan in such a way that the reader will have the feeling of being part of the history.

From one point of view, the most valuable aspect of this research is given by the author approach to what is known as the European continent. In the international relations field, the terms Western Europe and Eastern Europe have often been used. However, it should be noted that these regions (especially the Eastern one) have never been a geographical concept in itself, is considered only a geopolitical and (or) ideological notion. Even if, following the collapse of the Soviet

Empire, the Eastern region was divided (following the enlargement of the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance) into Central and Eastern Europe, Morgan research concerns Europe as a whole and not how we are tempted to believe that there are two or more Europes.

Consequently, this book is not just a chronicle of the events. It stands for an iconic book of an event that changed the path of the Cold War. It serves as an imperative for anyone interested in contemporary history as well as foreign policy experts. The Helsinki moment illustrates that there is still reason in international politics, which the political world, today, requires for such an accord.

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