

How Others See Ford

By Craig R. Whitney
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The foreign leaders who have met with President Ford in recent months say they have been impressed with his honesty, his personal warmth, and his grasp of the issues.

A survey by New York Times correspondents in West Germany, Canada, Israel, Japan, the Soviet Union, and France shows that the impression Mr. Ford left with the men who lead these lands is generally more favorable than the one reflected in the press.

All of them recognize that they will be dealing with him for at least the next two years, and possibly longer. Chancellor Helmut Schmidt of West Germany, according to his press aide, Klaus Bolling, thinks the President will grow into his new responsibilities.

While this stops short of saying that Mr. Ford bowled over the German leader with a display of expertise in Washington on December 5 and 6, other leaders apparently made similarly favorable assessments.

Most of them are not experts, either. They are politicians, like Mr. Ford, and politicians seem to like each other.

Both Schmidt and Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet leader, whom Mr. Ford met in Vladivostok November 23 and 24, liked the new president better than his predecessor. The Russian thought Mr. Nixon "aloof," while the German chancellor is said to have found him "cramped and inhibited."

The former Japanese Foreign Minister, Toshio Kimura, put it this way: "There was no trace of what people call the 'tricky Nixon color' in the new president."

Among those surveyed, only the Canadian prime minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, thought Mr. Ford "not very articulate." The Canadians found the President spoke haltingly and was sometimes repetitive.

The assessment was reported by a Canadian who was present when Trudeau and Mr. Ford met.

The British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, will be going to Washington January 30.

The British press, which Wilson has sometimes attacked, has been tough on the President. Peter Jenkins of the Guardian wrote, "By the common consent of everybody consulted by this reporter, insiders and onlookers alike, the President is — in a favored phrase — a dumbbell."

The glow of the first contacts between the new President and his foreign counterparts is tempered somewhat by the fact that only with Brezhnev and with the French President, Valery Giscard d'Estaing, did Mr. Ford have much serious negotiating to do.

The other visits were mainly to get acquainted.

When there were differences — with the Russians on the complex problems of strategic arms limitation and with the French on an international energy policy — the foreign leaders regarded Secretary of State Henry Kissinger as the expert.

A Soviet journalist who was at Vladivostok said afterwards: "It was successful, but Ford didn't quite understand it. It was Brezhnev talking with Kissinger."

However, knowledgeable diplomats in Moscow said that while Brezhnev obviously knew more about the issues than Mr. Ford, having dealt with them longer, the two arrived at their tentative agreement to limit strategic missiles and other nuclear delivery vehicles "when Brezhnev realized he could work with Ford."

Brezhnev, like all foreign leaders, probably took Mr. Ford very seriously because of his position.

And the President, according to American sources in Moscow, made it very clear that he would be running in the 1976 elections. This, they say, "boosted his credibility with Brezhnev as a summit partner who could be counted upon for some continuity."