

Ford vs. Solzhenitsyn: II

The White House has responded rather curiously to the charge by Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn that President Ford is betraying Eastern Europe by participating in next week's Helsinki summit and signing the so-called European security agreement there. The White House defense is that the document in question "in no way legally settles borders in Eastern Europe." But neither Mr. Solzhenitsyn nor anyone else says that it has.

The real point of complaint is that by signing this document Mr. Ford could be giving political and psychological endorsement to Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe for the indefinite future.

It is, furthermore, difficult to perceive any major reciprocal advantage to the United States and the free world generally from the lengthy declaration on European security which the President will sign. In effect, the President will be according United States backing to the involuntary inclusion of about 100 million Europeans in Moscow's political domain, which the United States has long ago had to accept in practice but not necessarily to welcome and ratify.

Perhaps not since he pardoned Richard Nixon has President Ford looked so badly in public as he has since his recent unplanned confrontation with Mr. Solzhenitsyn. It all began with a white lie that the President had no time for the most eloquent living Russian spokesman for freedom. Secretary Kissinger then wrongly implied that Mr. Solzhenitsyn wanted an aggressive anti-Soviet policy that would pose, if adopted by the United States, danger of war.

Mr. Solzhenitsyn's position is plain enough. He attacks the present détente as a falsehood in which the Soviet Union gains much while giving little. He questions why the United States strengthens the Soviet regime, while at the same time it is clear from Soviet propaganda and from Communist tactics in Portugal and elsewhere that the Kremlin's objective of the destruction of democracy here and abroad has not changed. He wonders out loud why there must be transfer of valuable advanced American technology—including technology of potential military significance—to a country that teaches enmity and contempt for the United States in every school.

A genuine argument can be made against Mr. Solzhenitsyn's position; he has no more of a monopoly on the truth or on prophetic foresight than any other mortal. What is really dispiriting is the intellectual bankruptcy and the political maladroitness with which President Ford and his associates have bungled the Solzhenitsyn challenge.