

# Gerald Ford: His Views on

Box 4/14/74

Vice President Ford, in a recent interview with Henry Brandon, Washington correspondent of the *Sunday Times* of London, assesses his political power, relationship with the President, and a range of major foreign policy issues.

**Q:** Where do you see yourself in the spectrum of American society, as a Middle American?

**A:** I really can't write a definitive description. I do come from Middle America, my whole background was there until I had an opportunity to go to Yale Law School which got me out of the Middlewestern provincial atmosphere. The experience of going to school in the East, of living in the East, cer-

tainly broadened my horizons. The experience of being in World War II, which I spent mostly in the Pacific, also had a broadening effect. Therefore, although I have basic Middlewestern roots, these other experiences had the influence of making me see a broader picture. Of course, coming down to Washington and living in this environment for 25 years also broadened that spectrum significantly. But my early upbringing certainly has had a very sizeable impact on my political outlook.

**Q:** Fathers tend to have a desire to imbue their children with certain values. What are the values that you wanted to imbue into your children?

**A:** I wanted to give my children, two boys and one daughter, desire to be an active participant in society. I had gotten that point of view from my stepfather, who, although he went only through the eighth grade, and was never a terribly successful businessman, felt strongly about the need of being a participant in political life, in community activities, in civic projects of one kind or another. The strange thing is that as of now, only my younger son who is 22 years old, seems to be interested in politics. But of course they may change.

**Q:** There exists now a curious state of mind in this country which is reflected in the low popularity rating of

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the President as well as of Congress. What do you think this is due to?

**A:** First let me say that it is very disturbing that both the President—the Executive—and Congress are held in such low esteem. I believe that unless the popularity of the President and the Congress went up, it could lead to an erosion of our institutions. I think both are in trouble because our domestic problems seem almost overwhelming. People, for one reason or another, think that the President or Congress are not doing the right thing to solve such nagging problems as inflation and energy. They've been conditioned over the years to believe that the government

can simply wave a wand and everything is taken care of. Their unhappiness is reflected in the opinion polls.

**Q:** Do you think that the decline of confidence in government is due to the government's inability to solve these practical problems or because of what they conceive to be immorality in government?

**A:** I don't think there is a decline in morality, frankly. I think if you go back historically, you will find that the level of ethics and honesty in government today is higher than it was a hundred years ago. But through better communications, what existed for a long

time is more evident today as far as the public is concerned.

**Q:** If I may bring up the unavoidable, Watergate: If you became President, Mr. Vice President, what would you do in order to make sure that such a scandal is not repeated?

**A:** You first have to define what you mean by Watergate. The actual break-in at the Democratic headquarters—that is simple—we ought not to employ and tolerate people who have that kind of mentality about a political campaign.

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**Q:** *What I mean by Watergate is the broader aspect of it, the attempt to undermine the entire electoral process.*

**A:** I would firstly insist, as a practical matter, that the National Republican Committee run the political campaign. Separate organizations—like the Committee to Re-elect the President—tend to bring in less experienced people who have lots of ideas, but most of them are really not as effective in the political arena as those tried in political campaigns over the years. National committees have the professionals who would not have done such an idiotic thing as the break-in into the Democratic National Committee.

**Q:** *But don't you think that the lines of communication reached into the White House, in fact very close to the President, and that therefore you must have been thinking about how a President protects himself against aides who act too independently for him?*

**A:** I think the best thing to insure that what happened in the Watergate case, in the broader sense, doesn't happen again, is for the President to monitor, to a greater degree, what his top people are doing. I think I understand what happened. If you go back to the spring of 1973, the President was preoccupied with China, the detente with the Soviet Union and he was trying to end the war in Vietnam. I would wager—and give big odds—that the President probably said to John Mitchell: "I have all these foreign policy problems of major consequence, you run the campaign." Obviously the President did not monitor the campaign, the people, the programs, sufficiently. I know that if the President had known of any of these things going on, he would have categorically cut them off. But he was preoccupied and unfortunately, the people he gave responsibility to were not wise enough, not ethical enough, to run the campaign properly. But I think despite the pressing burdens of foreign policy, you just cannot, as a President, let things be under the total responsibility of others without doing some monitoring.

**Q:** *You, Mr. Vice President, enjoyed great popularity in Congress de-*

*spite the partisan feelings that exist. What was your secret?*

**A:** I believe the best asset was my reliability in dealing with people whether they were Republicans or Democrats, liberal Republicans or conservative Republicans. There was never any question about where I stood. On the other hand, I was always willing to sit down and negotiate face to face within the party or with the opposition. Compromises were reached, everybody knew that what I said I would do, I would do.

**Q:** *David Broder, the political commentator, wrote the other day that popularity doesn't necessarily mean power. As a Vice President, you are now somewhat removed from Congress. What do you think is the power you have left with Congress now?*

**A:** I understand what Dave Broder was trying to say, but in the last month or two, I have been able to call friends in both sides of the aisle, who were willing to listen to my side of the argument, and in most cases responded, so to that extent, I still have an influence and power, but how long that will last is rather difficult to tell.

**Q:** *This brings me to the peculiar position of a Vice President under the American constitution. It is not easy for a Vice President to establish the right relationship with the President. How is your relationship with President Nixon?*

**A:** I have unlimited access whenever I want it. He has taken the initiative on occasion to ask me to talk with him and our personal relationship is improving rather than deteriorating. I see nothing in the future that would make it more difficult.

**Q:** *You don't see him then as a person who likes to isolate himself?*

**A:** I don't see him, from my own point of view, as an isolated person. On the other hand, I know that he is a private person who likes to think, to study and make his own choices about what a policy ought to be when he has 3-4 options. That is his way of operating. So to that extent, he is a private person; in his relationship with me it's a direct personal approach.

**Q:** *You have said that you are convinced that the President will not be impeached. What is your conviction based on?*

**A:** I don't think there is sufficient evidence under the definition of impeachment in the constitution. The Democrats can never get enough support if they make it a political decision. And since I believe that there is not enough evidence under the very precise definition in the Constitution, I don't think they can do it on a substantive basis.

**Q:** *But there are several definitions: One developed by the legal counsel of the House Judiciary Committee, another by the Department of Justice and another by the President himself at his last press conference.*

**A:** The mere fact that there is an uncertainty about it makes it even more difficult for the proponents of impeachment to succeed.

**Q:** *The relationship between the U.S. and Europe is now in flux. If I may turn to foreign policy problems, how do you see the future of transatlantic relations?*

**A:** I have always supported, from the outset, the NATO Alliance. I always thought that the joint efforts with Western Europe were of great importance. At the same time, I recognize that we cannot expect as many nations as are included in the Alliance all to play to precisely the same tune year after year, different governments come and go, different countries have problems that are unique one year and require in another year a different direction as far as economic policy is concerned. Therefore, although I get a little disappointed with some of the countries going off on tangents, I would still strongly support the continuation of NATO and the Alliance with the hope that I would understand individual problems on a day to day basis.

**Q:** *There is now a serious discussion about the possible withdrawal of American troops from Europe. What do you think are the prospects for maintaining those troops?*

**A:** Unless we work out one or two things, Congress will force a unilateral withdrawal of part of the American personnel and U.S. strength in Europe. I mean that unless we work out some sort of agreement with the Soviet Union and its allies on a mutual balanced force reduction, Congress will probably direct that some troops be withdrawn. I personally am against it, but to be realistic, you have to recognize that this is a probability. If we do not get a mutual force reduction agreement, if we want to avoid Congress taking action, then the other members of the Alliance have to make a bigger contribution, either in regard to troop strength or dollar support.

**Q:** *All the indications are that the latter is unlikely because of the change in the whole balance of payments situation and the unwillingness of the Europeans to spend more on defense. What are the forces in Congress, as you see them, that are pressing for a withdrawal?*

**A:** The pressures on Congress, in my view, are growing to a substantial degree. What disappoints me most is that some of the leading advocates come from areas which used to represent the bastions of internationalism, eastern members of Congress. This is a sort of carry over from the Vietnam problem. I believe in the Senate today it is nip and tuck, in the House, as I recall the vote last year, there was a margin of 40-50 which is too close. Today it is probably even narrower. There is one hopeful element, though, and only time will tell: that is the influence of Henry Kissinger in his new position. If Henry made a strong plea, I think it could have a sizeable impact on Congress not to reduce troops unilaterally. I think Henry Kissinger is probably the most popular Secretary of State, at least in my time. I don't mean to downgrade the others, but it seems that he has caught the imagination of the American people. If he made a real plea to give him more time to negotiate with the Soviet Union or if he made a plea that he could get more support in terms of dollars or troops

from our Allies, that might stem the tide temporarily.

**Q:** *Do you see, at least psychologically, a contradiction between the detente policy with the Soviet Union and your saying that the allies should put up more in terms of troops and money?*

**A:** I don't see any contradiction. The detente might hopefully lead to a lesser burden for everybody, that is only one aspect of the detente, but an important one. I don't think we would be negotiating to the degree that we are today if we didn't have the detente. The fact that it is in existence gives us the opportunity to achieve some of the things all of us want. There is some skepticism indeed as to the desirability of the detente. But I agree with those who say that it is helpful rather than harmful and I'm a little perplexed at some of the criticism by people who, only five years ago, were talking about detente. Now they are probably the most cynical about it. I don't understand their opposition or their questioning today when earlier they were praying for it.

**Q:** *There exists a great controversy about future strategic missile policies, which after all, is at the core of the detente policy.*

**A:** I believe that SALT I laid a good foundation, but I think that we have got to review it. What we do in SALT II will be more important than SALT I. And this is where the crunch is going to come. Will we be able to control the multiple independently targeted warheads which we have and the Russians are now acquiring. At this stage, there is not total unanimity within the Administration about what the precise U.S. position ought to be at the final bargaining.

**Q:** *And where do you stand Mr. Vice President?*

**A:** At this stage, I'm only listening. I have listened to the arguments pretty much across the board, I probably will refine my own position after we will have had another meeting in the next few weeks when we will focus more sharply on some of the issues not

yet agreed upon and I will be able to give you a better answer then.

**Q:** *Since part of the detente includes a greater volume of trade and major American credits with Russia, do you favor those?*

**A:** Yes I do.

**Q:** *Do you share the Kissinger viewpoint about the need for a multipolar diplomacy which aims at establishing equilibrium among the superpowers or do you believe in the more old fashioned approach, which was to rely on strong alliances between the U.S. and Western Europe and the U.S. and Japan?*

**A:** I would agree with Dr. Kissinger's viewpoint and policies, because things have changed. We live in a totally different world, the globe has shrunk and totally new weapons have come into use; communications and transportation have also changed.

**Q:** *Are you planning any trips abroad?*

**A:** I have no specific plans although I definitely would like to go abroad, and at the back of my mind I'm thinking of places that I would like to visit, and of course before doing so, I would talk to the President and Henry Kissinger to get their thoughts. I would like to go to those areas which are important and of some consequence. I think you can better analyze what is right and wrong by on-the-spot conversations and by on-the-spot observations. And I am thinking of both allies and adversaries. But I haven't got a firm date and it would certainly not be before the summer, more likely in the fall.

**Q:** *What do you think of the future relationship between the Russians and the Chinese? Do you think there is a possibility of their going to war with each other?*

**A:** I hope not, because a conflict of that magnitude would be very bad for the world at large in that it might, and I underline might, draw other powers into that conflict. The last thing the world needs today is a global military conflict. We have enough problems without such a conflict.