

# H-Diplo

## H-Diplo FRUS Reviews

[h-diplo.org/FRUS/](http://h-diplo.org/FRUS/)

No. 4

Published on **22 November 2011**

Reissued, 9 June 2014

H-Diplo FRUS Review Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse

Web and Production Editor: George Fujii

Commissioned for H-Diplo by Thomas Maddux

Edward C. Keefer and William B. McAllister, eds. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume E–3, Documents on Global Issues, 1973–1976*. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2011.

<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve03> .

Stable URL: <http://h-diplo.org/FRUS/PDF/FRUS4.pdf>

Review by **Jeff Bloodworth**, Gannon University

Akira Iriye and John Lennon would both find something of value in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-3, Documents on Global Issues, 1973-1976 (FRUS)*. Documenting the transnational issues of Richard Nixon’s truncated second term and the Gerald Ford interregnum, this volume corresponds to Iriye’s historiographical niche. In the same way, this *FRUS* volume also proves Lennon’s lyric, “Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans” true—even in foreign affairs. Indeed, though obscured by Vietnam, détente, and the Helsinki Accords, many of these transnational concerns became the decisive foreign policy issues of the twenty first century.

Defining global issues according to Nixon’s and Ford’s own criteria, the editors devoted a separate subseries volume to energy, disarmament, food policy, population control, and women’s issues. This *FRUS* volume addresses the Law of the Sea, Antarctica, Space and Telecommunications, Drug Control, Terrorism, and Human Rights. Lacking Vietnam’s moral appeal or triangulation’s oomph, these transnational concerns, nevertheless, came to matter so much more than policymakers could have imagined at the time.

For a foreign policy genius, Richard Nixon sure got a lot wrong. From détente’s short shelf life to counseling Ronald Reagan’s against partnering with Mikhail Gorbachev, the president often missed the mark. Despite these miscalculations, Nixon understood the international situation of the 1970s. Proclaiming that the “postwar period in international relations has ended,” the president realized American foreign policy required significant alterations.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Richard Nixon, *U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s: A New Strategy for Peace* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 3.

In the Nixon Doctrine, the administration renounced swash-buckling internationalism. Claiming, “Interests must shape our commitments,” the president set a decidedly realist path.<sup>2</sup> The administration not only confronted the post-post-war world, it dealt with an emerging array of transnational issues. Hardly inclined to empower non-state actors, Nixon confronted issues which were inherently and increasingly global in scale.

Lacking the media fireworks of a START Treaty, the Law of the Sea negotiations were, nevertheless, important. Sparked by increased global trade, newfound environmental concerns, and technological change, Nixon and Ford pushed a series of multilateral, bilateral, and international agreements governing the oceans. Working through the United Nations, both administrations forged a consensus on knotty, transnational issues.

Scholars interested in the intersection of domestic politics and foreign policy will find the “Law of the Sea’s” Memorandum of Conversations of particular interest. Truly ‘manna from heaven’ (for historians) these Mem-Cons perfectly reveal how the picayune interests of a few thousand American fishermen could shape international diplomacy and undermine treaty negotiations.

This volume’s Antarctica section is a substantive reminder of Nixon’s use of international institutions to pursue realist interests. Hardly the sole reserve of pointy-headed idealists fomenting discord, transnational organizations can be used to promote stability and consensus. Prompted by new technologies, American policymakers sought new accords on Antarctic resource exploitation. Using the 1959 Antarctic Treaty and its Treaty Consultative Meetings, the administration slowly pushed the signatories toward its desired goal.

This volume shows Nixon and Ford confronting a new age in American foreign policy. Not only brought about by Vietnam and Western Europe’s economic recovery, technological advances also gave birth to this new epoch. Space and telecommunication technologies in particular produced new and vexing challenges. Confronting matters ranging from Soviet communication intercepts to weather satellites, this document collection reveals an administration intent on pressing its advantage within the confines of accepted international norms and via transnational institutions.

While Nixon’s 1971 “War on Drugs” receives more than its due attention, his administration’s global strategy to stymie the flow of illegal drugs is comparatively ignored. Recognizing drug addiction and trafficking as a national scourge, Nixon directed the State Department to take a more active role. Curbing Turkey’s legal poppy production and creating embassy “narcotics officers” represented just some of the president’s directives. Treating illegal drugs as a foreign policy matter, the White House managed a thorny transnational issue.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

In proclaiming the dawn of a new era in U.S. foreign policy, Nixon was more prescient than he realized. No single challenge reveals this more than the emergence of terrorism as a top national security priority. Indeed, the editors' claim the administration oversaw a "fundamental re-definition of the problem of terrorism" during its second term.<sup>3</sup> The documents show an administration working on a variety of fronts and with a plethora of government and international organizations to stem access to nuclear devices and the flow of terrorist letter bombs.

Nowhere is the changed nature of the international system more apparent than in the realm of 'human rights,' a product of the activism of the 1960s. In the early 1970s, Congress and assorted special interest groups pressed the White House on the issue. Led by Donald Fraser and Henry Jackson, Congressional Democrats pushed human rights onto the Nixon and Ford foreign policy agenda.

While Kissinger, Nixon, and Ford were reluctant, at best, to make human rights a priority, the volume reveals that both administrations did conduct a thorough reexamination of their human rights priorities. Moreover, due to their aversion to the issue, both allowed international organizations to take the lead. In this way, transnational actors were at the forefront of a defining foreign policy issue.

This *FRUS* highlights the documentary sources for the next generation of Nixon-Ford foreign policy scholarship. Vietnam, détente, and the Helsinki Accords still matter. These presidents, however, encountered additional issues, which not only jive with the emerging subfield of transnational history, but also happen to carry much contemporary relevance.

**Jeff Bloodworth**, Ph.D., is an associate professor of history and department head at Gannon University in Erie, Pennsylvania. He has published articles on U.S. political history & foreign policy in *The Historian*, *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, and *The Journal of the Historical Society*. His manuscript, "The Wilderness Years: A History of American Liberalism, 1968-1992" is under consideration with University of Kentucky Press.

---

**This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 United States License.** To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

---

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve03/preface>