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# Jimmy Carter's Foreign Policy: The Battle for Power and Principle

Frances M. Jacobson  
*Old Dominion University*

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JIMMY CARTER'S FOREIGN POLICY: THE BATTLE FOR POWER AND  
PRINCIPLE

by

Frances M. Jacobson  
B.A. May, 1983 Old Dominion University  
M.A. May, 1990 Old Dominion University

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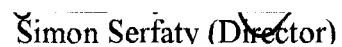
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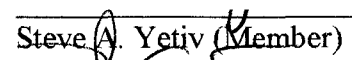
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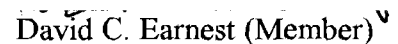
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

August 2008

Approved by:

 Simon Serfaty (Director)

 Steve A. Yetiv (Member)

 David C. Earnest (Member)<sup>v</sup>

## ABSTRACT

### JIMMY CARTER'S FOREIGN POLICY: THE BATTLE FOR POWER AND PRINCIPLE

Frances M. Jacobson  
Old Dominion University, 2008  
Director: Dr. Simon S. Serfaty

Evaluating the foreign policies of presidents while they are in office or shortly after their tenure ends can sometimes lead to conclusions that prove to be unsound in the future. The case of Harry Truman exemplifies this. When he left office in 1952 his approval rating was in the 20 percentile range. Yet, he set the tone and direction of United States foreign policy that led eventually to the successful conclusion of the Cold War. The foreign policy of President Jimmy Carter was also generally viewed as a failure by many scholars in the field, both during his time in office and for some years beyond. Another analysis is now due.

This work reviews five issue areas of Carter's foreign policy: the Panama Canal treaties, arms transfers and human rights, Southern Africa, Camp David Accords, and the Iranian revolution and hostage crisis. It argues that Carter pursued policy choices that proved to be in the best interests of the United States in the long run. These issues were and are some of the most contentious that any president has been faced with in the post war world. Emotions ran high on many of them, which can create a toxic environment for many politicians, most of whom either have their eye on the next election or on their legacy. Carter, however, was not held prisoner to either of these. He consistently did the right thing, but seldom the popular thing. Camp David was the exception, and he has been given high praise for his work in helping to stabilize the Middle East, a region that

is filled with old hatreds and grievances. It is difficult to achieve anything positive there and most presidents shy away from the Arab-Israeli problem because it yields little or nothing in political rewards. Carter's policies were not without their critics, however, and he got few accolades for his work on the other areas of concern that this work covers.

This work has examined Carter's foreign policy from the vantage point of what we know now, and argues that he tried to work within a framework of power *and* principle. It concludes that while his steady diplomacy, his prudence, and his refusal to use a military option except as a last resort made him unpopular at the time, in hindsight, he was successful in working for the long term national interests of the United States.

To Gabriella Allen  
See your chances and take them!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am also indebted to the two other committee members who agreed to participate in this project: Dr. Steve A. Yetiv who encouraged me to apply to the program and who helped me grasp some difficult ideas, and Dr. David C. Earnest for his endless patience and humor as he showed me that economics can be as interesting as history.

Working on this course of study has been a very great privilege, and I am very appreciative of the opportunity to both Old Dominion University and to the Graduate Program in International Studies, especially Dr. Regina Karp whose diligence helped me during the final stages.

I also wish to thank my daughter, JJ Jacobson-Allen and my friend, Anita Phipps, for their support. They listened to more Carter stories than they should have had to endure, and for that I am thankful.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The foreign policy of the Carter Administration is commonly viewed as a failure because of perceived uncertainty, false starts and changes in direction, and the inability to assess the international landscape correctly. Carter's personal integrity and values were not enough to secure the White House in 1980. In fact, argues Douglas Brinkley, he was "damned with faint praise," with pundits saying that he would be remembered for what did *not* happen on his watch.<sup>1</sup> The early literature, especially, is littered with titles such as *Eagle Entangled*<sup>2</sup>, *Jimmy Carter and the Politics of Frustration*<sup>3</sup>, and *The Carter Implosion*<sup>4</sup> that point to disappointment. From the start it was argued that there was a basic conflict between the politically inexperienced outsiders who came to Washington in 1977, and the politically savvy insiders already there.<sup>5</sup> According to some critics, for example, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski's "architectural contribution" to Carter's foreign policy had been built over the years on intellectual clichés that added to the President's seeming confusion.<sup>6</sup> This work, on the contrary, argues that the Carter policies were more successful than was appreciated at the time, especially from the perspective of what we know now.

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This paper follows the format requirements of *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14<sup>th</sup> ed.

<sup>1</sup> Douglas Brinkley, "The Rising Stock of Jimmy Carter: The "Hands On" Legacy of Our Thirty-ninth President" *Diplomatic History* 20 no. 4 (fall 1996): 505-529. Stuart L. Bernath Memorial Lecture, delivered at Chicago, 20 March 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth A. Oye, Donald Rothchild, and Robert J. Lieber, eds. *Eagle Entangled: U.S. Foreign Policy in a Complex World* (New York: Longman, Inc., 1979).

<sup>3</sup> Garland A. Haas, *Jimmy Carter and the Politics of Frustration* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Co., 1992.)

<sup>4</sup> Donald S. Spencer, *The Carter Implosion: Jimmy Carter and the Amateur Style of Diplomacy* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> Haynes Johnson, *In the Absence of Power: Governing America* (New York: Viking Press, 1980).

<sup>6</sup> Simon Serfaty, "Brzezinski: Play it Again Zbig," *Foreign Affairs* 32 (autumn 1978): 3-21.

Not every assessment of the administration was entirely negative. Thus, Stanley Hoffmann gives a fairly sympathetic appraisal of the administration, insisting that one of Carter's greatest achievements was the aggressive re-assertion of idealism in the United States' foreign policy.<sup>7</sup> Hoffmann goes on, however, to point out that four years later there had been too many disappointments for people to remember that Carter had restored a sense of unity in the country, with the appeal to the nation to behave as a champion of certain inalienable values that had been severely damaged during the Vietnam War and Watergate scandal. As the administration put its values into action, America's prestige began to rise. Carter also recognized that the world had changed – that power was now more diffused than it had been since 1945. This, concludes Marina v. N. Whitman, was “leadership without hegemony.”<sup>8</sup> Carter's style was clumsy, according to some; and the core of his failure, according to Hoffmann, was in the area of Soviet-United States relations. There seemed to be strategic incoherence, as the administration struggled to come to terms with the myriad regional problems, especially those concerning human rights. To Hoffmann, two archetypes were in competition: the “Popeye” archetype of the United States as the guardian of stability and law and order through military strength, and the missionary archetype helping the poor abroad and bringing American values to the underprivileged. Neither archetype fit, and Americans in their desire for simplicity reverted to their faith in American exceptionalism.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Stanley Hoffmann, “Requiem.”

<sup>8</sup> Marina v.N. Whitman, “Leadership Without Hegemony: Our Role in the World Economy, *Foreign Policy* 20 (autumn 1975): 138-160.

<sup>9</sup>Donald M. Fraser, “Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy: Some Basic Questions Regarding Principles and Practice,” *International Studies Quarterly* 23, Special Issue on Human Rights: International Perspectives (June 1979): 174-185.

This study will return to the initial judgments and appraise Carter's time in office in the context of what we know now. His policies will be analyzed within the broad context of the ideas of power and principle,<sup>10</sup> arguing that he tried to find a middle ground, always mindful that a successful foreign policy must combine both of these attributes. His overarching goal, one that surely helped to define his approach to specific issues, was to "make United States foreign policy more humane and moral." "...he genuinely believed that as President he could shape a more decent world."<sup>11</sup> In a speech at Notre Dame early in his presidency, Carter said that he believed "that we can have a foreign policy that is democratic, that is based on fundamental values, and that uses power and influence, which we have, for humane purposes."<sup>12</sup> Carter thought that power should provide the means to achieve morally desirable ends; and he also believed that the two must be complementary. His top advisors, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and Secretary of State Cyrus States Vance, agreed. Utilizing power to the exclusion of principle would inevitably lead to failure. Values mattered in this administration, and this raised questions on the part of the political right about whether an effective United States foreign policy should include morality and idealism as well as power. On the other hand, the left believed that in the search for justice in the world, the United States could not leave out moral or ethical questions, especially those affecting human rights. At times it seemed that power and principles conflicted, but Carter was successful in not sacrificing justice in favor of order. Some scholars have argued that his

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<sup>10</sup> This is, in fact, the title of Brzezinski's memoirs: Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985).

<sup>11</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 48.

<sup>12</sup> President Jimmy Carter, speech at the University of Notre Dame, 22 May 1977 in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, vol. 1. Washington: Federal Register Division, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, 1977, 954.

emphasis on human rights, especially when it concerned the Soviet Union, was ineffective and even dangerous. It could drive a “beleaguered politburo leadership to feel less able and less willing to pursue détente and international cooperation with the United States.”<sup>13</sup> Others disagree.<sup>14</sup> From the vantage point of 2008, Carter had a far-sighted identification of United States national interests, and he mounted a sustained effort to pursue them. This study will contribute to an understanding of how principles and power can be balanced in order to project an effective foreign policy; how they sometimes clash; and how the dilemmas Carter encountered interfaced with both, often making policy choices difficult. He and some in his administration tried harder than is usual to think about the longer future and about how ethical policies could affect the United States for the better. This makes his administration as a whole a valuable case study in American idealism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Five issue areas will be addressed: the Camp David Accords, the Iranian Revolution and hostage crisis of 1979, arms transfers, the Panama Canal Treaties, and Southern Africa. These issue areas are where the administration’s greatest successes occurred. Strategic concerns and their interplay at the regional level will be a factor, as will human rights. By bringing hindsight to bear, current policies towards a very troubled Middle East and Persian Gulf region, trends towards nuclear proliferation, a restless Latin America, and a still neglected Africa can be analyzed.

This work argues that Christianity was a primary motivator in Carter’s policies. This, along with a strong faith in the values of the United States, led him to pursue goals

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<sup>13</sup> George Quester, “Consensus Lost,” *Foreign Policy* 40 (autumn 1980): 18-32.

<sup>14</sup> Hoffmann, “Requiem.”

that other presidents shied away from.<sup>15</sup> “Christian pragmatism” might best describe Carter’s policies. This means simply the application of the Christian principles of freedom and a sense of responsibility to economic and political issues, with the understanding that dogmas and generalizations will be discarded if they do not contribute to the establishment of justice in a given situation. While there is no “Christian” economic or political system in the West, which puts a “wall of separation” between church and state, there is a Christian attitude. It does not pretend to be God, but, rather, understands that as human beings one must make choices between greater and lesser evils.<sup>16</sup> Which policy option is more or less just is the question to be answered. Some of the threads of Christianity and its impact on United States foreign policy are discussed in the literature review. The nature of the world Carter inherited which helped to condition his policies is another important issue. The study will examine the broad setting that Carter inherited. It will also examine the dilemmas he faced and the options he had. It argues that Carter’s foreign policies that are examined in this research were much more successful than is commonly believed, due to his patience and diligence; or, to put it another way, his prudence. Another element to be examined concerns his closest advisers. It will scrutinize the positions taken by Brzezinski and Vance on the various issues to determine how policy was influenced, and whether the choices were perceived by other actors as being correct.

The role of the press will also be looked at. It never warmed up to Carter, and gave him net negative coverage for forty-seven of the forty-eight months he was in

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<sup>15</sup>See Alan C. Lamborn, “Risk and Foreign Policy Choice,” *International Studies Quarterly* 29 (December 1985): 385-410.

<sup>16</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, ed., *Faith and Politics* (New York: George Braziller 1968), “Theology and Political Thought in the Western World,” 55-56, first published in *The Ecumenical Review* and used by permission.

office. This contributed to the *perception* of weakness and vacillation. Furthermore, the press failed to realize that there were unavoidable contradictions in many policies. Far from educating the public on the complexities and contradictions, they perpetuated the myth of coherence. The consensus in United States foreign policy had been shattered by the Vietnam War, but Henry Kissinger, national security advisor who later became secretary of state under Nixon and Ford, papered over the contradictions and lack of consensus. They were hidden on his watch. Carter, an open and honest man, exposed them by tackling the issues, some of which were long neglected, in a straightforward, open, and fair manner. The Middle East is probably the best example of these contradictions, a region where the United States gives substantial support to Israel, yet has a stake in the moderate Arab regimes, and a vital interest in the availability of oil.<sup>17</sup>

The East-West domination of foreign policy led to a series of proxy wars between the Soviet Union and the United States, fought out in the Third World. Caught in a maze of unresolved contradictions, Carter brought to his administration advocates of an alternative approach to the Third World. Four different policy goals stand out. First, the United States would no longer automatically equate its interests with the survival of right-wing dictatorships against their domestic opponents, even those with Marxist leanings. Second, it would be cooler to regimes that grossly violated human rights, and would not overlook these violations just because a government claimed to be anticommunist. Third it would establish working business relations with non-aligned

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<sup>17</sup>Thomas L. Hughes, "Carter and the Management of Contradictions," *Foreign Policy* 31 (summer, 1978): 51; see also Stanley Hoffmann, "The Hell of Good Intentions," *Foreign Policy* 29 (winter, 1977-78): 3-26. For a brief discussion on his openness with the press, see "Why is Jimmy Smiling? Why Not?" *Time* Archive, April 4, 1977, available at [www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,947846,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,947846,00.html). Accessed 23 January 2007. See also, "The State of Jimmy Carter," *Time* Archive, February 5, 1979, available at [www.time.com/time/printout/9,8816,946195,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/printout/9,8816,946195,00.html). Accessed 23 January 2007.

nations on the left that were willing to conduct their economic affairs in a way that was not harmful to the West. Fourth, it would treat Third World states on their own merits, as legitimate negotiating partners, not just as pawns in the United States-Soviet Union competition. He faced an uphill battle, with critics across the political spectrum. The drive to reverse course was primarily led, however, by those in the center and on the right. Two themes dominated their challenges: the need to back diplomacy with threats of force, and the need to sustain friendly regimes against all attacks. By 1980, this group claimed that Carter was an appeaser because he had failed to practice a “muscular diplomacy.”<sup>18</sup>

The remainder of this introduction will discuss the themes of power and principle. It will include a short discussion on their historical role in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, briefly introduce the major actors and their views on power and principle, and review the rivalry between the National Security Council and the Department of State over the control and direction of United States foreign policy, which surfaced openly during the Iranian hostage crisis. It will also examine the themes of human rights and arms sales and will preview the five issue areas that will be examined in this study.

## POWER

Power can be defined as A’s ability to get B to do something that B would otherwise not do. Some scholars differentiate between hard and soft power.<sup>19</sup> Hard power is the ability to project, use, or threaten force. Realists, such as Hans Morgenthau, believe that the world is a Hobbesian one in which war of all is waged against all. Realism has been the dominant paradigm in foreign policy since at least the 1960s, and it

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<sup>18</sup> Tom J. Farer, “Searching for Defeat,” *Foreign Policy* 40, Tenth Anniversary (fall 1980): 157, 159.

<sup>19</sup>See Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Paradox of American Power*, (Oxford: University Press, 2002).

postulates that the world is anarchical, meaning there is no overarching world government, and this puts states into a self help situation. Security is the most important thing, and because states live in a bad neighborhood, they are socialized to seek security. Thus, states will build up their militaries accordingly. Morgenthau laid the groundwork for much of realism's basic tenets.<sup>20</sup> However, he saw in realism an effort to build a bridge between normative and empirical thinkers so that leaders could craft their policies on foundations that were "ethically sound and realistically conceived."<sup>21</sup> E.H. Carr also wrote that

"the utopian, fixing his eyes on the future, thinks in terms of creative spontaneity the realist, rooted in the past, in terms of causality. All healthy human action...must establish a balance between utopia and reality...."<sup>22</sup>

This is the most effective way to craft a successful foreign policy.

Today there is not much room within the realist paradigm for the choice of moral values that might seem on the surface to conflict with the national interest. Wilsonian idealism, or liberalism as it is known today, dominated United States foreign policy from 1919 to 1939 and beyond. Some writers in the interwar years believed that the postwar world could be made more stable and just than any period in previous history. The overwhelming catastrophe of World War One was seen as the result of the power politics of previous generations from the time of the Napoleonic Wars. Balance of power, which was supposed to check ambitious, was unreliable. They believed that war resulted from patterns of state interactions that could be changed through "moral education and the

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<sup>20</sup> Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 4th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1967).

<sup>21</sup> Robert W. McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy* (New Jersey: Princeton, 1992), 5.

<sup>22</sup> E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis 1919-1939* (First Harper and Row ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1964).



collective action of the peoples of the world.<sup>23</sup> The education of the public would be essential. Today, liberals generally think that international organizations and regimes can lessen anarchy, and that cooperation can occur. They lengthen the shadow of the future, connect the present to the future, identify and punish defectors, and provide transparency.<sup>24</sup>

Soft power is another form of power. It is the ability to set the agenda in ways that shape the preferences of other powers, and it arises from values.<sup>25</sup> It is very much about *image* and is an important part of modern day power. It is about getting the other side to follow you because they want to, not because of intimidation.<sup>26</sup> Carter set the example for the post-Vietnam world, with his commitment to diplomacy, his endless patience, and his adherence to principle; while, at the same time, creating the Rapid Deployment Force, proclaiming the Carter Doctrine, and strengthening the joint command capabilities of the military. These actions connected United States hard and soft power. Today the United States' soft power – the “summation of economic leverage, cultural pull, and intellectual clout that has made the United States the preeminent force in the world – ” is being challenged for the first time since the end of the Cold War. China's rapid rise to power, for example, is judged to be benign by many nations in Asia, but there are worrisome signs, and history suggests that it is difficult to deal with rising states. There are two prongs to the United States' approach to China – engaging and hedging. These two prongs, which also connect hard and soft power, need to be integrated more effectively. The United States, according to Campbell and O'Hanlon,

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<sup>23</sup> McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth Oye *Cooperation Under Anarchy*, (Princeton: University Press, 1985).

<sup>25</sup> Nye, *Paradox of American Power*.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

should cultivate allies and friends, provide foreign aid in a targeted manner, strengthen and use military power prudently as a stabilizing influence, develop better intelligence capabilities, and demonstrate a sustained political will. Evolutionary military policies, not radical changes, will be the most effective in reminding China that the United States is the guarantor of regional stability, but the United States should also work with Asian nations, including China, on mutual security goals. In the meantime, the second and equally important battlefield is the “hearts and minds” struggle with Islam today. This battlefield includes Asia as well as the Middle East, and the United States should launch a strong diplomatic initiative beginning with Indonesia, the largest Islamic nation in the world. The United States provided post-tsunami relief that dwarfed China’s contribution and that highlighted America’s economic and military strength. The aftermath of this shared experience has opened a window for a long-term partnership.<sup>27</sup>

In the broad picture, Indonesia connects with the Middle East. An emphasis on democracy, human rights, and values helped to win the Cold War, and a broad policy framework for Islamic countries that features foreign assistance, diplomacy, and other soft programs, coupled with a strong military and effective homeland defenses, could be an effective tool in fighting Islamic extremism.<sup>28</sup>

Historically, the United States has projected a positive image about beliefs and culture to the world at large. Projecting a nation’s norms and ideology are sources of power. George Kennan, a realist, understood this when he advised the United States to put a positive image before the world and stay true to American values, in his “Long Telegram” in 1947. These differing uses of power are an important element to be

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<sup>27</sup> Kurt M. Campbell and Michael E. O’Hanlon, *Hard Power*, (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 200-209.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-141.

analyzed in the Carter administration. . The interaction between the state department and the national security council, which became especially important in the Iranian hostage crisis, will be examined to ascertain whether either agency had complete control over the direction of policy.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the United States used both hard and soft power – at times separately, at times jointly, practicing Wilsonian idealism even as it built a militarized state as the realists wanted. Historians disagree on when America entered the century – that is, whether it was 1898 or 1917. Both can be argued, but whatever one concludes, the nation entered the world stage in 1898 with a projection of hard power, became an imperial power, with territories, protectorates, and a colony; and shortly thereafter became closely entwined in another of Europe’s “world wars” in 1917. After World War I was over, the United States failed to use its hard power a single time in Europe or Asia, even in the threatening decade of the 1930s. Its involvement in World War II produced the acquisition and use of the greatest power ever known in history. When the war was over in 1945 the nation used a combination of hard and soft power, rebuilding Europe with Marshall Plan aid; encouraging the early cooperation of France and Germany with the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC); leading the United Nations (UN) police action against North Korea; rebuilding Japan economically and agreeing to protect it militarily; and more. Although not always evident at the time, this combination of power and principle worked very well until the country became embroiled in Vietnam. The Vietnam War shattered the foreign policy consensus in the United States, ruined at least two presidencies, and led to a more assertive Congress in the realm of international affairs. This was Carter’s inheritance.

The Carter administration is recognized for understanding that power, especially economic power, was more dispersed in the 1970s than it had been previously, and tried to work within that framework, as did Nixon before him. As Richard Rosecrance has argued, the rise of the European Community and Japan as strong trading states now presented new challenges, because their cooperation could not always be certain, in spite of the fact that the United States was the guarantor of their security.<sup>29</sup> The multipolar world played a role in the decisions of the administration, especially those on arms transfers and the Iranian revolution and hostage crisis. Some argue that economic interdependence renders military power unusable, but Joseph Nye refutes this, claiming that military power dominates economic power; exercising it, however, brings higher costs. That is, relative to cost, there is no guarantee that it will be more effective than economic means in securing goals.<sup>30</sup>

To many, power is often equivalent to force. Eighteenth and nineteenth century utopians were often ridiculed for their beliefs that force was an aberration in the international system. With the development of modern technology in the nineteenth century they believed the use of force was self-defeating.<sup>31</sup> Presented in this light, utopian ideas seem hopelessly outmoded, especially in the twenty-first century. However, this was not the dominant strain of liberal internationalist thought in the twentieth century. Liberal internationalists are more likely to view force as a last resort, rather than a first, but it is in their toolkit. This is the school into which Carter should be

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<sup>29</sup> Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State*, (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

<sup>30</sup> Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Power and Interdependence* 3d ed., (New York: Longman, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth Waltz, "Force, Order and Justice," *International Studies Quarterly* 11 (September 1967): 278-283.

placed. A fuller discussion of liberal internationalism as well as realism appears in the literature review.

Democrats, especially, have been painted as the anti-war party, unwilling to use force to accomplish goals which are in the national interest. This, however, can be debated; the rising political right of the 1970s and 1980s began constructing the picture, and became more successful at the time of the Iranian hostage crisis.<sup>32</sup> With the blessing and encouragement of the Iranian government, fifty-two Americans were held hostage for 444 days, being released only after Ronald Reagan was elected president. Although all the hostages came home alive, Carter was depicted as a failure – a weak man, unwilling to do what was necessary to end the crisis. The truth is quite the opposite, in light of what we know now, and as this work will argue. The litany of accusations against the Democrats went on during the Clinton administration as well, in spite of a number of successful policy initiatives. With America facing a terrible debacle in Iraq, it is time for new ideas on national security, which might in actuality mean a return to traditional diplomacy, utilizing such things as well thought out economic sanctions and the use of international organizations, all overlaid with a generous portion of prudence, as the country stands firm on its principled positions. Iran could, once, again, be the place where Carter-like uses of American power might be successful as the United States tries to deter Iran from building nuclear weapons.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of the effects of the word “hostage” see Scott L. Harris, “The Rhetorical Dimensions of a Crisis: A Critical Evaluation of the Iranian Hostage Situation” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1989).

<sup>33</sup> Campbell and O’Hanlon, *Hard Power*, 30-31.

## PRINCIPLE

Carter is commonly credited (or cursed) for getting human rights issues back on the international political agenda. He traces his concern for them back to his upbringing in a segregated south.<sup>34</sup> Born in Plains, Georgia, Carter inherited the legacy of the American Civil War – namely the refusal of whites “to accept the children of liberated slaves as legal or social equals.” After whites were disenfranchised for being loyal to the South, they considered themselves justified in controlling the political system of their region after Northern domination ended. Rural dominance in most of the South was guaranteed by basing election results on counties, rather on the votes of individual citizens. The Depression fueled the resentments against the federal government all over again. Personal relationships between blacks and whites on the Carter family farm were quite different from those of today, however. Their daily lives were closely intertwined, in spite of the fact that segregation and white superiority was accepted. For whites who were lazy or dishonest, or who had personal habits that were repulsive, “white trash” was a harsher epithet than any racial slur. Carter relates that his final judgment of people he knew was based on their own character and achievements, not on their race.<sup>35</sup> Blacks were unable to vote, serve on juries, or otherwise participate in the political process in the South; and this opened Carter’s mind and heart to the black majorities in Southern Africa who suffered under a similar system.

One of the most pertinent themes in United States history is that the American people have a humanitarian spirit – they stand up for justice and fair play. Carter’s concern for human rights was a source of power for the United States; it did not erode it

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<sup>34</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Our Endangered Values: America’s Moral Crisis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 8.

<sup>35</sup> Jimmy Carter, *An Hour Before Daylight*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 19-21.

as was argued by some. After the Vietnam War, most Americans were anxious to restore America's moral position in the world, and in 1976 they turned to Carter to do this. Asking what some of the attributes of a superpower are, he suggests that they might very well mirror those of a person. "These would include a demonstrable commitment to truth, justice, peace, freedom, humility, human rights, generosity, and the upholding of other moral values."<sup>36</sup> He believed that there is no inherent reason why the United States cannot be the "...international example of these virtues. Our government should be known, without question, as opposed to war, dedicated to the resolution of disputes by peaceful means, and, whenever possible, eager to exert our tremendous capability and influence to accomplish this goal." He also believed that by following these precepts, America's own well being would be enhanced and that the trust of others, along with their admiration and friendship for the United States would be restored.<sup>37</sup> Although Carter wrote these words in 2005, it seems obvious that these values had been developed over the course of his life and that he has tried to remain true to them, whether dealing with the Soviet Union or Southern Africa, and whether popular or not. These principles of seeking justice, peace, freedom, humility, human rights, generosity, and other moral values will be examined in the course of this study to ascertain their role in his administration. Brzezinski writes that when Carter took office it seemed that United States foreign policy was stalemated on the level of power and "excessively cynical on

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<sup>36</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Our Endangered Values*, 199.

<sup>37</sup> See James H. Rutherford, *The Moral Foundations of United States Constitutional Democracy* (Pittsburgh: Dorrance Publishing Co., 1992).

the level of principle. We were determined to demonstrate also the primacy of the moral dimension in foreign policy.”<sup>38</sup>

*National Security Council vs. United States State Department*

Carter was determined to lead the country in a new direction. No longer would the Soviet Union be the sole fixation of the United States. Instead, every country would be recognized as being unique, with its own problems, and the United States would not simply try to achieve a position of strength against one adversary, the SU. Military solutions would be viewed skeptically. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance agreed; Brzezinski was less enthusiastic, but swallowed his doubts in the early days.<sup>39</sup> Brzezinski, as Kissinger before him, went to work quietly to make the NSC the nerve center for foreign policy. Carter, according to Brzezinski, wanted a simplified structure of governmental agencies in general, and that meant a sleek and lean structure of the NSC. Brzezinski proposed the establishment of two basic committees; one was to be the Policy Review Committee (PRC) which would deal with three categories of issues:

- Foreign policy issues, including both regional and topical;
- Defense policy issues; and
- International economic issues.

The various departments would take the leadership role. That is, a Foreign Policy Committee would be chaired by the secretary of state, while a Defense Issues Committee

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<sup>38</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 81; see also Richard A. Rutyna and John W. Kuehl, eds., *Conceived in Conscience* (Norfolk, VA: Donning Company Publishers, 1983). For a current look at the combination of morality and power, see Anatol Lieven and John Hulsman, *Ethical Realism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 2006.)

<sup>39</sup> Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 7.



would be chaired by the secretary of defense. The second committee was the Special Coordination Committee (SCC) which was charged with:

- Intelligence policy issues;
- Arms control; and
- Crisis management.

At a meeting at St. Simon, an island off the coast of Georgia, President-elect Carter announced this plan to those present, which included the members of his new cabinet and his principal staff assistants. These included Carter's chief of staff Hamilton Jordan and his press secretary Jody Powell. Cyrus Vance became Secretary of State; Harold Brown Secretary of Defense; Michael Blumenthal Secretary of the Treasury; Griffin Bell Attorney General; Cecil Andrus Secretary of the Interior; Bob Bergland, Secretary of Agriculture; Juanita Kreps Secretary of Commerce, Ray Marshall Secretary of Labor, Joseph Califano, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, Patricia Roberts Harris Secretary of Housing and Urban Development; and Brock Adams Secretary of Transportation. There were a few others of cabinet rank who also met with Carter's top officials as equals: Bert Lance, Director of the Office of Management and Budget; James Schlesinger who would become the first Secretary of Energy; Andrew Young Ambassador to the United Nations; Charles Schultze Chairman, Council of Economic Advisors; and Robert Strauss, Special Trade Representative, as well as Brzezinski. In his memoirs, Brzezinski writes that Carter's announcement "will enable me on my return to Washington to draft or actually to redraft my proposals on the NSC, to send them down for his approval, and thereby establish the basis for a system that I can use effectively."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 60

In hindsight it seems clear that he put a structure into place that would tend to concentrate foreign policy decisions in the NSC, which he believed was the logical location.

Although Brzezinski writes that he agreed with Carter's desire to create a more humane foreign policy, not all would agree that this played anything more than a minor role in the policies he suggested.<sup>41</sup> Some argue that Brzezinski was convinced that East-West relations should be at the core of United States foreign policy. He was a realist who believed in the conflictual nature of politics, and who also believed that Soviet ideology, which stressed the importance of a world order dominated by socialism, intensified conflict. Others disagreed. Brzezinski conceived and became the first director of the Trilateral Commission, a group sponsored by David Rockefeller, which had Carter, Vance and Treasury Secretary Michael Blumenthal as members. It grew out of opposition to the bilateral relationship with the Soviet Union which was the focus of the Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy. Brzezinski stressed good relationships with allies, especially Europe and Japan. He gave poor grades for the Nixon-Kissinger policies for its treatment of Japan and its indifference to Lesser Developed Countries (LDCs). He called for a new framework between advanced nations, for giving the oil producing countries a stake in that framework and for including the LDCs. In 1970 he argued that joint scientific and technological endeavors by the United States and the Soviet Union could help stimulate a sense of common purpose. By 1974, it seemed obvious that his

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<sup>41</sup> Gerry Argyris Andrianopoulos, *Kissinger and Brzezinski: The NSC and the Struggle for Control of U.S. National Security Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

stance had hardened, and he criticized the SALT agreement for conceding numerical superiority to the Russians on the basis of American technical superiority.<sup>42</sup>

Cyrus Vance, the new secretary of state, was also concerned that the NSC should be organized in a way that “would permit a thorough airing of key policy issues without engaging the senior foreign policy and national security advisers in time-consuming debate to no useful end.” Vance points out that the personal dimension would be unusually important in the Carter administration. He believed that Carter was unpretentious himself and did not like inflated egos in others. He emphasized team work and collegiality. Vance supported this approach with one critical reservation. He believed that “only the president and his secretary of state were to have the responsibility for defining the administration’s foreign policy publicly.” However, as time went on, a serious breach of this understanding developed in spite of Carter’s acceptance of the principle. Also, as time went on, Brzezinski increasingly began to take on the role of policy spokesman. Vance claims that as divergences grew between Brzezinski’s and his own statements on policy, Brzezinski became “a serious impediment to the conduct of our foreign policy.” It also became a political liability because it appeared to Congress and foreign governments that the administration did not know its own mind.<sup>43</sup>

Historically, two patterns of presidential leadership have guided the NSC. Some presidents prefer to be intimately involved in defining national strategy and its implementation as well; others reserve decision making for themselves but abstain from the day-to-day supervision of policy, permitting a strong secretary of state to dominate.

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<sup>42</sup> Nicholas Wade, “Brzezinski: Role of Science in Society and Foreign Policy,” *Science*, New Series, 195 (11 March 1977): 966-968; see also Zbigniew Brzezinski, Current Events, “Tactician for the Establishment,” MERIP Reports 54 (February, 1977): 18-19.

<sup>43</sup> Vance, *Hard Choice: Critical Years in American Foreign Policy*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 35, 36

Broadly speaking, Carter exercised the presidential style. The head of the NSC benefits enormously from the presidential pattern, becoming not just a policy coordinator, but also an adviser on policy choices. But Carter emphasized that the secretary of state would be the chief policy adviser and wanted him to be the lead player. Brzezinski claims that Carter soon became disillusioned, finding that the state department did not have many new or innovative ideas.

Brzezinski, for his part, claimed that Vance did not communicate effectively and therefore the president asked him to be more outspoken. He recounts that after his appearances on the Sunday morning talk shows, Carter, and sometimes Rosalynn, would call to praise his performance. Brzezinski believes that this unfortunately fed the image that the national security advisor overshadowed the secretary of state. This had adverse consequences for both him and the president. One of the most telling disagreements concerned the Iranian Revolution, when no clear policy goals emerged partly because of a flawed policy process, exacerbated in part by the growing dispute between Vance and Brzezinski.<sup>44</sup>

Vance recounts that the structure of the NSC proposed by Brzezinski largely retained the previous system of specialized committees, but unlike the Nixon administration, the departments would assume the leadership roles. He was concerned about the relative distribution of responsibility within the organization. Vance believed that the secretary of state should play the paramount role on all foreign policy issues and

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<sup>44</sup> See Alexander Moens, "President Carter's Advisers and the Fall of the Shah," *Political Science Quarterly* 106 (summer 1991): 211-237; Bruce W. Jentleson, "Discrepant Responses to Falling Dictators: Presidential Belief Systems and the Mediating Effects of the Senior Advisory Process," *Political Psychology* 11 (June 1990): 353-384; Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The NSC's Midlife Crisis," *Foreign Policy* 69 (winter 1987-1988): 88-89.

some national security issues; because he felt that “nothing is more central than that military instruments be always seen as means of, and not ends of, foreign policy.”<sup>45</sup>

About a week after the meeting on St. Simon, the president accepted a procedure proposed by Brzezinski for recording the views and recommendations that would emerge from the meetings of the two central committees of the NSC. When no policy recommendations emerged, the national security advisor, using the notes of a staff member, would prepare a summary report for the president. If a meeting of agency principals made recommendations for a policy, Brzezinski would submit a presidential directive (PD) to Carter for his signature. In neither case were the summaries or PDs to be circulated to the SCC or PRC participants for review prior to their submission to the president. This gave the national security advisor the power to interpret the thrust of the discussions or frame the policy recommendations of the department principles. Vance adamantly disagreed with this process and went to the president, but Carter said that he preferred it because of the danger of leaks if the documents were circulated before they reached his desk. Unfortunately, as Vance stresses, leaks had become a way of governing in Washington, in order to promote or discredit certain courses of action. The department heads were welcome to go to the White House to view any draft proposals if they liked, but time constraints inhibited this activity. Vance admits that he made a serious mistake on not insisting that the draft materials be reviewed before they went to the president. He found, as time went on, that often there were serious errors in interpretation of various discussions, and that the documents were too “terse,” losing the nuance and interrelationship between or among issues.

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<sup>45</sup> James Meernik, “Presidential Decision Making and the Political Uses of Military Force,” *International Studies Quarterly* 38 (January 1994): 121-138; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 36.

Brzezinski had a close relationship with Carter which preceded the presidential campaign. As Brzezinski and the others were establishing the Trilateral Commission, they decided to include two governors on it, one Republican and one Democrat. They decided that, instead of the usual Northeast Democrat, it might be interesting to have one from the South. Carter was attractive, at least in part, because they believed that he had opened up trade offices for Georgia in Brussels and Tokyo. This was obviously their man. However, they then discovered that it was his predecessor who had done that. Nonetheless he got on the Commission. By 1975 it was obvious that Carter was running for president. Carter asked Brzezinski to attend the press conference where he would announce his candidacy, and Brzezinski agreed. As usual the press did not treat Carter very well, and certainly did not take him seriously. Carter handled the situation superbly, telling the reporters he would win the Iowa Caucus, and the New Hampshire primary, and they would keep George Wallace below 40 percent in Florida. The press would then have to change its tune. Brzezinski came away convinced that this was a man to be reckoned with. He was also impressed with Carter's courage on the issue of peace between the Arabs and Israelis, and with his emphasis on the need to focus on the Palestinian question, which was barely on the radar screen at the time. Throughout the campaign Brzezinski advised Carter on foreign policy issues. By the time Carter appointed him Assistant for National Security Affairs, the two men had a well developed personal relationship. Brzezinski thought Carter would be reasonably tough and realistic in foreign affairs, yet would be guided by certain basic principles, a source of America's strength. As for what Carter liked about Brzezinski, Brzezinski believed that it was his

ability to communicate quickly and to the point, and to crystallize a clear Democratic foreign policy in the future.<sup>46</sup>

Vance's fear of time-consuming, tedious, and often aimless debate at the senior level came to pass. Eventually, he found it easier to go to the president, Brzezinski, Harold Brown (the secretary of defense), or other department heads to avoid time-consuming formal meetings. As the United States- USSR relationship deteriorated and policy differences began to spill over, more issues were drawn upward to the political level. Senior officials increasingly monitored the details of policy implementation. For Vance, his nightly report to the president contained a brief report on and an analysis of important developments. He also used it to raise issues directly with the president. Unlike most other documents, this one bypassed the NSC.<sup>47</sup> An informal system paralleled the formal.

Two other ways of communicating were the President's weekly breakfast and a weekly lunch that Brzezinski, Brown and Vance held. Both of these proved especially helpful, according to Vance, because they were free of the constraints of formal agendas, "agency positions, and bureaucratic infighting." Furthermore, there were no note takers present. It provided a forum for an unrestrained exchange of views among the top three of the president's foreign policy advisors and more and more became a place where agreement could be reached quickly on a broad range of national security issues, much to the annoyance of other agencies. The agreements were quickly followed by policy recommendations to the president.

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<sup>46</sup> Brzezinski: "Tactician for the Establishment," 18; Simon Serfaty, "Brzezinski: Play it Again, Zbig," 3-21.

<sup>47</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 35-39

## PREVIEWS OF THE ISSUES TO BE EXAMINED

### *Panama Canal Treaties*

During Lyndon Johnson's administration long simmering Panamanian nationalism exploded when some American students raised the American flag on a Canal Zone campus, an act that violated a ban on flying either the Panamanian or American flag. Massive rioting broke out and Panama broke diplomatic relations with the United States. Three days of bloodshed followed with four American soldiers and twenty Panamanians dying. Dozens more were injured. The loss of life plus the fact that the Canal's locks and dams were vulnerable to sabotage gravely concerned Johnson and the American military. The Panamanian president, Robert Chiari, demanded that all existing treaties between the two countries be revised. Johnson concluded that it was indeed time to take another look at them. After diplomatic relations resumed, the two countries agreed to renegotiate the treaties. By June 1967 the Johnson administration had succeeded, and it announced agreement on three treaties. No further progress was made, however, because Congressional opposition to the changes was so strong that they were never submitted for ratification; and in 1968 when General Omar Torrijos came to power in Panama he renounced them. Four years later the Nixon administration announced that a "set of principles" had been agreed to. These principles effectively called for the elimination of the concept of United States control over the Canal in perpetuity which had been part of the original treaty constructed by John Hay, the United States secretary of state, and Philippe Bunau-Varilla, a French businessman connected with the New Panama Company, and which was signed in November 1903. The Canal became an issue in the 1976 primaries when Ronald Reagan accused the Ford



administration of keeping a “mouse like silence” in the face of “blackmail” from Panama’s “dictator.” Reagan claimed that “When it comes to the Canal, we built it, we paid for it, it’s ours and we should tell [Omar] Torrijos and Company that we are going to keep it!”<sup>48</sup>

When Carter took office in 1977 he recounts that it became clear that if the United States was going to negotiate seriously with Panama, it would have to begin immediately, and any agreement would have to include giving control over the Canal to Panama and acknowledging Panamanian sovereignty. It would be an uphill battle. A Senate resolution had been introduced in 1975, signed by 38 senators, which opposed giving sovereignty over the Canal Zone to the Panamanians. The public also strongly opposed relinquishing it.<sup>49</sup>

The debate was exacerbated by the events of the past decade: Vietnam, Watergate, inflation, the oil crisis, and the loss of military and economic supremacy. A real fear of national decline was in the air. Relinquishing sovereignty over the Canal seemed to symbolize a decline in American will to maintain global pre-eminence. The president might have been tempted to duck the issue. However, at the forceful urging of Vance, Carter moved on this issue during his first week in office.<sup>50</sup> Brzezinski agreed. Vance was particularly well versed on Latin America, having been Johnson’s personal

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (Fayetteville, University of Arkansas Press, 1995) 156-158 passim; See also, Clara Nieto, *Masters of War* Translated from the Spanish by Chris Brandt (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003).

<sup>49</sup> Abraham F. Lowenthal “Rethinking U.S. Interests in the Western Hemisphere,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 29 (spring 1987): 9; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 159; see also George D. Moffett III *The Limits of Victory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); See as well Ted J. Smith III and J. Michael Hogan, “Public Opinion and the Panama Canal Treaties of 1977,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 51 (spring 1987): 5-30.

<sup>50</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 140.

emissary during the anti-American riots in 1964, and Brzezinski had an excellent advisor in Robert Pastor who had worked on those issues during the campaign.<sup>51</sup>

Carter faced mounting dangers to the security of the Canal, a hostile public, and a reluctant Senate. The military informed Carter and Congress as well, that the Canal could not be defended permanently if the United States did not maintain a working relationship with Panama. In other words, America needed to exercise its power in a different way if it wanted to protect the canal over the long term from possible destruction. In addition, this seemed like a chance to signal to all of Latin America that the Carter Administration understood that the relationship between the two regions had changed and it was prepared to work to construct more mature relationships based on mutual respect.<sup>52</sup> Carter was convinced that the country needed to “correct an injustice...” to sever a “diplomatic cancer, which was poisoning our relations with Panama.”<sup>53</sup> Carter knew the Canal was under serious threat of attack if we did not act soon. Harold Brown, according to Carter, also came to the same conclusions. Brown understood that the nation had traditional security interests in Latin America, dating back to the Monroe Doctrine, and Panama was especially important.<sup>54</sup> One helpful element in the Canal fight was the wave of anti-imperialism that was in the international air. Today, these considerations seem to be the perfect mesh of power and principle; that is, the opportunity to solve a festering problem and to right a long-standing wrong. It became, however, the perfect storm – a “fire bell in the night” – that foreshadowed a rocky future.

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<sup>51</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 134.

<sup>52</sup> The Commission on United States-Latin American Relations, *The United States and Latin America: Next Steps* reported on in “Good Neighbors Again,” *Time*, 3 January 1977; Walter La Feber, *The Panama Canal*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 94; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 134.

<sup>53</sup> Jimmy Carter *Keeping Faith*, 159.

<sup>54</sup> Harold Brown, *Thinking About National Security*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1983).

Carter claimed that the issue was a litmus test of how the United States, a superpower, would treat a “small and relatively defenseless nation that had always been a close partner and supporter.”<sup>55</sup> The issue was as thorny as the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles, but Carter succeeded in his efforts where Woodrow Wilson failed. Although the treaties were successfully negotiated and ratified, it came at an extraordinarily high price politically. In the moment, however, it seemed like a new beginning to the country’s relationship with Latin America.

This part of the study will examine the question of whether Panama gained sovereignty by ratifying the treaties, or exchanged one form of colonialism for another. It argues that the treaties were not a bad bargain for Panama, contrary to what Richard Falk argues,<sup>56</sup> rather, it was the best that could be gotten. The United States in fact did send a more humane signal to Latin America, and was not just another form of what some detractors of the country’s policy toward Latin America have termed “Yankee imperialism.”<sup>57</sup>

### *Arms Transfers*

Carter believed that the world was awash in arms and it would be a better place if the United States and other nations could restrain the trafficking in them. He joined the issues of arms transfers and human rights, something that Congress had begun. Issuing Presidential Directive 13 (PD 13), he created an additional step in building a set of guidelines for a new arms export policy.

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<sup>55</sup> Jimmy Carter *Keeping Faith*, 160.

<sup>56</sup> Richard A. Falk, “Panama Treaty Trap,” *Foreign Policy* 30 (spring 1978): 68-82.

<sup>57</sup> See Library of Congress Country Studies, “Panama: The 1977 Treaties and Associated Agreements.” Available at [www.locweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?fd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+pa0032\)](http://www.locweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?fd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+pa0032)). Accessed 12 December 2006.

The international sale of arms is not new in history, and it has usually been seen as a legitimate function of government. From its earliest days, the country supplied arms to Latin America as former colonies struggled for independence from Spain. Continuing along this line, it also supplied arms to Texas in its war for independence. This set the tone for the next 150 years. International trafficking in arms picked up during World War I, then experienced a decline during the Great Depression. World War II saw a rise in sales once again.<sup>58</sup> The Cold War continued to keep the arms merchants busy, but Congress became concerned over the growth of sales when they expanded from \$3.8 billion in 1965 to more than \$20 billion by the time Carter took office.<sup>59</sup>

In 1976 Congress passed the International Security and Arms Export Control Act, or simply the Arms Export Control Act (AECA), in an effort to dampen down this trade. This act set the parameters within which the executive branch could act. By the time Carter took office, not only NATO allies were getting significant arms, but other, unsavory, nations with bad reputations on human rights were purchasing large quantities. Many people did not want to see the nation as the chief arms merchant in the world, but there are both costs and benefits in arms transfers, and these must be weighed carefully in considering which countries should receive arms. The circumstances of a region can and have led to dangerous confrontations between the Soviet Union and the United States: the

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<sup>58</sup> Miles D. Wolpin, *America Insecure* (Jefferson NC: McFarland and Company, Inc, 1991), 31; Richard M. Moose, with Daniel I. Spiegel, "Congress and Arms Transfers," in Pierre, ed., *Arms Transfers and American Foreign Policy* (New York: New York University Press, 1979).

<sup>59</sup> Andrew J. Pierre, "Introduction," in Pierre, ed., *Arms Transfers and American Foreign Policy*, (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 11-13; Lucy Wilson Benson, "Turning the Supertanker: Arms Transfer Restraints," *International Security* 3 no. 4 (spring 1979): 4; David R. Stone, "Imperialism and Sovereignty: The League of Nations' Drive to Control the Global Arms Trade," *Journal of Contemporary History* 35 (April 1980): 214-219, 230. See also Sally Marks, *The Illusion of Peace* (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd, 1976); see Jean A. Garrison, "Framing Foreign Policy Alternatives in the Inner Circle: President Carter, His Advisers, and the Struggle for the Arms Control Agenda," *Political Psychology* 22 (December 2001): 775-807 for a discussion of Carter's views on arms in general.

Yom Kippur War is a good example. Moscow began to escalate deliveries of arms to the Arab states after hostilities began, and made it clear that it would stand behind its clients, possibly intervening with its own forces. The United States resorted to massive air lifts of arms and put its forces on the highest alert. The decision in peacetime to sell arms thus led to a genuine risk of direct confrontation between the two superpowers.<sup>60</sup>

During the Nixon-Ford years there were rising tensions between the executive and legislative branches of government over the direction and control of United States foreign policy, with Congress taking a more assertive role. These tensions led to the passage of the AECA, which contained a clear policy statement on arms transfers as well as a human rights policy. This was contained in Section 502B(2) of the act. The language contained such phrases as “consistent patterns of gross violations” of human rights and denied arms to governments who were guilty of this. There were powerful lobbies at work, including much of the Foreign Service as well as the military industrial complex that wanted to continue business as usual. The Foreign Service believed that the United States’ position in troubled regions could be enhanced by the sale of arms to certain states, while the military industrial complex was interested in maintaining the lucrative markets for their wares. The human rights lobby also contributed to the conversation, hoping for a substantial decline in those sales. Carter, wanting to maintain a strong international posture for the nation, tried to find some middle ground, by using both power and principle to enhance America’s prestige in the world, while at the same time not

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<sup>60</sup> Barry M. Blechman, Janne E. Nolan, and Alan Platt, “Pushing Arms,” *Foreign Policy* 46 (spring 1982): 138-141; see also Leslie M. Pryor, “Arms and the Shah,” *Foreign Policy* 31 (summer 1978): 56-71 for a discussion of Congress’ alarm on the amount of arms transfers to Iran.

damaging the defense industry. It proved to be difficult, but Carter crafted a balanced policy.<sup>61</sup>

### *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*

Another urgent question that the administration sought to address early was the Arab-Israeli conflict. The story of Abraham's children was not a happy one, and problems created by World War I and its aftermath had bedeviled the diplomats of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Deadly problems had simmered beneath the surface for years, but when Israel declared its independence on May 15, 1947, open warfare broke out. Five Arab nations declared war on Israel. At the end of this war, Israel controlled all of Palestine, except the Gaza Strip which was later administered by Egypt, and the West Bank of the Jordan River which was governed by Jordan. Both of these areas were taken in subsequent warfare in 1967. By the early 1950s the Arabs considered the creation of the Jewish state a "heinous crime," and committed themselves to its annihilation. They blamed the imperialist West for the catastrophe. About 700,000 Palestinians fled into neighboring Arab countries after the 1948 war and were poorly assimilated, if at all. They became a constant source of trouble to Israel.<sup>62</sup> In 1977 Carter inherited the problem. He moved quickly to find a formula for convening a peace conference. He concluded that the best chance for peace would come by separating Egypt from the other

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<sup>61</sup> John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. "Conventional Arms Transfer Policy Statement by the President, May 19, 1977." Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted), Gerhard Peters (database). Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=7539>. Accessed 16 March 2007. Richard F. Grimmett, "U.S. Defense Articles and Services Supplied to Foreign Recipients: Restrictions on Their Uses," updated 14 March 2005, Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress, received through the CRS Web 9 March 2007, 1-2; Michael T. Klare, "Carter's Arms Sales Policies: Business as Usual," *Social Scientist* 7 (November 1978): 5.

<sup>62</sup> Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin, and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 46-49. See also Patrick Magee, "Grand Strategy Analysis: A Proto-Theoretical Approach" (PhD diss., Old Dominion University, 2005), 72-82, 153, 216, 220; See as well Fayez A. Sayegh, "The Camp David Agreement and the Palestinian Problem," *Journal of Palestine Studies* (winter 1979): 3-40.

Arabs' conflict with Israel. Anwar Sadat, president of Egypt, and Menachem Begin, prime minister of Israel, began secret negotiations and both concluded they would be better off dealing with each other directly, rather than dealing with the conflict through Washington which wanted a comprehensive peace. Any agreement reached would serve each country's national interests. Sadat's spectacular trip to Jerusalem in November 1977 broke down barriers, but when Begin did nothing spectacular to reciprocate, no agreement was reached. Miles apart, the two ended up relying on Carter's sincere desire and strong ambition to reach some accord. Carter's unprecedented personal intervention resulted in the 1978 Camp David Accords.<sup>63</sup> Vance recounts that a door had opened for genuine peace and just in the Middle East.<sup>64</sup> However, there was a certain vagueness in the language of the Accords, which led to problems later. It took longer than the Carter team wanted for the two sides to sign a treaty, but the following March the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty was signed. Sadat paid for this with his life in 1981, but this cold peace has held.<sup>65</sup> This was the first treaty ever between an Arab state and Israel and certainly did not solve all the problems. For example, the West Bank-Gaza negotiations were not resolved, although it had been a top priority. Nor was the principle of a freeze on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories solved. Not even the United States had the power to force these issues, but Carter achieved a remarkable victory nonetheless. Brzezinski calls Carter a "skillful debater, a master psychologist, and a very effective

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<sup>63</sup> Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, x, xi; see also Ghassan Bishara, "Zbigniew Brzezinski: Peace at an Impasse," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 14 (autumn 1984): 3-15 for a discussion of Sadat's trip to Jerusalem and what it accomplished.

<sup>64</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 227.

<sup>65</sup> See William B. Quandt, *Peace Process* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001); see also Moshe Dayan, *Breakthrough: A Personal Account of the Egypt-Israel Peace Negotiations* (New York: Knopf, 1981), 356-358; Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, x, xi; William B. Quandt, "Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 16 (summer 1987): 139-140.

mediator. Without him, there would have been no agreement.”<sup>66</sup> Brzezinski also gives a great deal of credit to Vance and recounts that he felt that the press did not give him enough recognition for his contribution. With Egypt and Israel at peace, the Egyptian army would be absent in any ensuing Arab-Israeli war. Without the Egyptians the Arabs had little hope of winning any war, and even with the Egyptians their chances were slim. The focus later shifted to the Palestinian predicament, especially after Yassar Arafat entered the public stage. Subsequent events have made any peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis seem unlikely. Although in principle many would like to see an autonomous Palestinian state, this has not come to pass. Carter writes that in any peace negotiations, the United States must convince all parties that it will be fair and unbiased; that the Arabs must recognize the reality that is Israel, and the Israelis must acknowledge Palestinian claims to equality and self determination in a portion of their homeland.<sup>67</sup>

This study will examine the principles sought by Carter in the Egyptian-Israeli agreement and those that were subsequently achieved. In general, the administration believed that the settlement should be based on the principles contained in United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 242, which would exchange land for peace. The study will evaluate the success or failure of the treaty in moving forward to a comprehensive peace in the region. Gaza, the West Bank, and settlements in the Occupied Territories will also be examined from the stance of 2008. This work argues that Carter laid the groundwork for a lasting peace, and that the chances for peace were

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<sup>66</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 273.

<sup>67</sup> Jimmy Carter, *The Blood of Abraham: Insights Into The Middle East* (Fayetteville, University of Arkansas Press, 1993), 192. See also Jimmy Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006.)



much better for the region than before the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Although several presidents have tried to achieve this, none has been willing to put in the time, effort, or patience that lay behind Carter's stunning success.<sup>68</sup>

### *Southern Africa*

In his 1977 speech at Notre Dame University, Carter stated that the United States was "committed to a peaceful resolution of the crisis in Southern Africa. The time has come for the principle of majority rule to be the basis for political order..." He believed that change must come quickly, and he stated that the United States stood ready to work with both European allies and African states to transform Southern African society while protecting it from external interference.<sup>69</sup>

The Western history of Southern Africa can be traced back as far as the Dutch landing in the region in 1652, and has continued into the modern era. Dutch, French, English and Germans began to settle in the region, and collectively they comprise the Afrikaner portion of today's population. The Europeans were able to enslave the native inhabitants, mostly through warfare. When the English appeared in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and gained control over the Cape of Good Hope, there began a long conflict between them and the Afrikaners. After the British abolished slavery in its empire in 1836, disgruntled Afrikaner farmers (Boers) moved northward, coming into conflict with other indigenous groups, such as the Zulus. As diamonds and gold were discovered in the region, more Europeans came and British investment rose sharply. Many blacks migrated to work in the mines, and mine owners built hostels to house and control the

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<sup>68</sup> See Adam Clymer, "Camp David at Top in U.S. Policy Poll," *New York Times* April 1, 1985; Adam Kreczko, "Support Reagan's Initiative," *Foreign Policy* 49 (winter 1982): 140-153.

<sup>69</sup> Jimmy Carter, Speech at the University of Notre Dame 22 May 1977.

workers, which created a pattern that extended throughout the region. The racial discrimination continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>70</sup>

Although the United States worked for human rights and an end to racial discrimination after World War II, its own segregationist policies hampered its efforts abroad. Carter has quite a bit to say about his administration's efforts to make human rights a cornerstone of his foreign policy, but there is little in his memoirs on this subject as it pertains to Southern Africa. Vance, however, devotes two chapters to the topic. He points out that Kissinger had put into motion negotiations on the Namibia and Rhodesia conflicts, but these were fragile. Further, America's relationship to black Africa was not good. Because of the country's support for the losing side in the Angolan civil war, most blacks across the region thought that the United States was concerned only about African problems to the degree they affected East-West relations. They also assumed that it wanted to protect its own interests through "a strong Republic of South Africa shielded by a barrier of black client states dependent upon Pretoria's political, economic, and military support." It was clear from the outset that this negative image had to be changed.

The administration recognized that by aligning itself with majority rule in the region, it could increase American influence and minimize Soviet influence. This would be the best way to prevent Soviet and Cuban exploitation of the racial conflicts. The principles to be sought after were majority rule, self-determination, and racial equality as

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<sup>70</sup> United States Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs, "Background Note: South Africa," available at [www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2898.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2898.htm). Accessed 30 October 2006; Richard Goldstone, "Ambiguity and America: South Africa and U.S. Foreign Policy," *Social Research* (winter, 2005), available at [www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m02267/is\\_4\\_72ai\\_n16126166](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m02267/is_4_72ai_n16126166). Accessed 20/3/06; See B.W. Hodder and D.R. Harris, eds., *Africa in Transition* (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1967) for a discussion on the decolonization of Africa; see as well Adrian Guelke, "Southern Africa and the Super Powers," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 56 (autumn 1980): 648-49.

a matter of basic human rights.<sup>71</sup> Edgar Lockwood, the Director of the Washington Office on Africa,<sup>72</sup> adds free market capitalism to the list of principles.<sup>73</sup> To do otherwise would convince the Africans that they were being used as Cold War pawns. The policies pursued in Southern Africa were not well understood by the public and were not popular in Congress. Because some black guerrilla groups were supported by the Communists, some conservatives thought that the administration supported Communism, and worked hard to convince it to support white minority rule in Rhodesia and Namibia. Some liberals and black organizations in the United States, on the other hand, believed that the administration was too cautious in its approach. The President, according to Vance, believed that it was in the long term interests of the nation to support majority rule and refused to do what was politically expedient. Again, Carter was besieged from left and right.

Most of the administration was in agreement with Carter's position on the principle of majority rule. Brzezinski recounts that his role was secondary, but that he had a group of strong advisors who educated him on the issues. These included such men as Thomas Thornton, Henry Richardson, and Jerry Funk. Vance's advisors were United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Andrew Young, Richard Moose, and Anthony Lake, who worked under the President's direction. Brzezinski defines his role as mainly making certain that the administration did not ignore East-West issues, mainly the Soviet-

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<sup>71</sup> See "Human Rights and Foreign Policy (1977) Jimmy Carter, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Jimmy Carter, vol. 1 (1977), Washington: Federal Register Division, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, 954; Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 256.

<sup>72</sup> The Washington Office on Africa, founded in 1972, is an ecumenical advocacy organization which seeks to articulate and promote a just United States policy towards Africa.

<sup>73</sup> Edgar Lockwood, "The Future of the Carter Policy toward Southern Africa," *A Journal of Opinion* 7 (winter 1977): 11-15.

Cuban military presence in Africa. He was afraid that this Communist presence might frighten whites in the region to oppose any power sharing arrangements.<sup>74</sup>

Edgar Lockwood thought that Carter's appointment of Andrew Young as his Ambassador to the United Nations was outstanding; because he was a living testament that non-violent political activism can propel blacks into the political elite. Carter said that Third World nations finally had an advocate who understood their problems.<sup>75</sup>

This section of the study will examine the region as a whole, especially the conditions in Rhodesia, Namibia, and South Africa, which seem to be the key states on which majority rule rested. It will argue that the administration stuck to the principles Carter sought, and Carter prevented it from getting sidetracked by the Soviet-Cuban presence. The United States was successful in preventing the Soviets making gains in the region while at the same time it contributed to the principle of majority rule.

#### *Iran and the Unraveling of A Presidency*

Arguably, the Iranian Revolution and subsequent hostage crisis presented the greatest challenge to the Carter administration. United States interests in Iran date back to World War II when the country began to see itself as Iran's protector. This was in response to the British and Soviet occupation of the country in order to block German influence. When the war was over, the British withdrew their troops, but kept control of Iranian oil. The Soviet troops, on the other hand, did not withdraw from the north, and actively encouraged a separatist movement in the province of Azerbaijan. Harry Truman, president of the United States "talked tough" to the Soviets, who subsequently withdrew.

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<sup>74</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 139-140. See also William J. Foltz, "United States Policy toward Southern Africa: Economic and Strategic Constraints," *Political Science Quarterly* 92 (spring 1977): 47-64.

<sup>75</sup> Jimmy Carter's press conference text reported by *The Baltimore Sun*, June 14, 1977 as quoted in Lockwood, "The Future of the Carter Policy toward Southern Africa."

In addition, Truman convinced the British not to interfere with Iranian nationalization of the oil industry because this might drive them into the Soviets' arms. Iran, therefore, gained at least some control over the oil revenues. Seven international oil companies (five of which were American) replaced the old Anglo-Iranian company. These now marketed Iranian oil. Mohammed Mossadegh, who had engineered the nationalization process, decided to oust the Shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. At the time, 1953, the nation saw "red" everywhere and became suspicious that if Mossadegh turned Iran into a republic, Communist influence would rise and the country could possibly become a Soviet satellite. Dwight Eisenhower was now president of the United States, and he was convinced Mossadegh was a Communist. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), assisted by right wing Iranian army officers, engineered a counter coup, consolidated the shah's power, and removed Mossadegh. The United States then became Iran's chief supplier of technical, economic, and military aid.<sup>76</sup> The military aid grew enormously under the Nixon and Ford administrations.

When the Carter administration took power, Vance envisioned a "far less intimate" relationship, but a more active role in the Middle East, completing the process initiated by Kissinger after the Yom Kippur War. This was to shift the American position westward in the context of the Egyptian-Israeli rapprochement and a strengthened Middle East collective security structure.<sup>77</sup> Vance recalls that the Carter administration's relations with Iran followed an approach similar to other administrations after World War

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<sup>76</sup>Smith, *Morality, Reason & Power*, 181-182; Steve Marsh, "Anglo-American Crude Diplomacy: Multinational Oil and the Iranian Oil Crisis, 1951-53," *Contemporary British History* [Great Britain] 21 no.1 (2007): 25-53.

<sup>77</sup>See Richard C. Thornton, *The Carter Years: Towards a New Global Order* (New York: Paragon House, 1991.) See also Thomas L. Hughes, "The Crack-Up: The Price of Collective Irresponsibility," *Foreign Policy* 40 Tenth Anniversary (fall 1980): 33-60 for a discussion of outside pressures on the Carter Administration.

II, although Iran and the United States drew closer together during the Nixon-Ford years as military cooperation increased. The United States viewed Iran as a major force for stability in the Persian Gulf region. Its military strength, along with its tilt toward the West, ensured access to oil and acted as an obstacle to would be Soviet expansion. Although the United States approach to the relationship was similar at least in some ways to those of previous administrations, there were differences in how bilateral relations were conducted, especially in the arena of arms sales and human rights. By January 1977 there *seemed* to be progress towards modernization under the direction of the shah. There was opposition from fundamentalist Islamic clergy and the landed class, but economic growth and a “façade of Western institutions obscured the narrowness of the shah’s political base and the deep internal problems of a traditionalist society in transition. The economic changes had not been accompanied by real political change.”<sup>78</sup> The “Nixon Doctrine,” saw regional states as being surrogates for American military power, and in 1972 the Nixon administration began to sell the shah almost any weapon he wanted. A well-armed Iran would take the place of a American military presence, which Vietnam had made impossible anyway. No one foresaw that the huge price increase in oil would allow the Shah to buy very large quantities of military hardware.

The military buildup was not accompanied by political reform, however, and it became an area of concern to Congress. It appeared that the shah’s ambitions went well beyond Iran’s borders. The shah’s record on human rights was abysmal, but knowledge about the opposition to him was sketchy, mainly because the Nixon-Ford administration was reluctant to make contact with it. Vance believed the opposition consisted of

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<sup>78</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 314; see also Bruce W. Jentleson, “Discrepant Responses” for a discussion of the influence of senior advisers on presidential decision making.

“Westernized secular politicians (grouped around the old social democratic National Front coalition), religious fundamentalists, leftist radical students and intellectuals, and the small Tudeh (Communist) party.”<sup>79</sup> Demonstrations grew and increasingly turned violent and, unknown to the administration, the shah, because of his illness, had lost touch with political reality. Although the State Department assured the shah that the administration supported him “without reservation” in the crisis, it would not try to tell him how to handle his own internal problems. Brzezinski thought the State Department had gone soft and given up on a military solution to the problem.

Brzezinski claimed that the crisis confronted the United States with two fundamental questions: “(1) What was the nature of our central interest...and what was truly at stake and must be protected as our first priority? And (2) how to maintain (and encourage from outside) political stability in a traditional but...modernizing state, in which the ruler’s absolute personal power was being challenged by an escalating revolutionary situation?”<sup>80</sup> Brzezinski’s answer to the first question was that Iran was of central importance in safeguarding American and Western interests in the Persian Gulf. He writes that although Vance and the State Department did not reject this view, they were more preoccupied with the democratization of Iran and feared actions that would bring about the opposite effect. When the crisis became acute State Department officials became more concerned with evacuating Americans *from* Iran than they were with the American position *in* Iran. Brzezinski had little faith in successful revolutions and saw

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<sup>79</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 315-316; Mark J. Gasiorowski, “The CIA Looks Back at the 1953 Coup in Iran,” *MERIP*, 216, (autumn 2000): 4-5.

<sup>80</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 354; see William H. Sullivan, “Dateline Iran: The Road Not Taken,” *Foreign Policy* 40 Tenth Anniversary (fall 1980): 175-186 for a discussion of what the United States ambassador to Iran thought should be the policy during the revolution.

no merit in asking the shah to give more concessions to the opposition.<sup>81</sup> Here was the most glaring and obvious example of the clash within the Carter administration between power and principle. There were conflicting voices and there was no agreement on what to do; hence no good policy options emerged. The most pressing decision was how far to back the shah in using force to put down the revolution or when to “disentangle American prestige from a political corpse.” There were no easy answers – in fact there were no answers at all. Too much had happened previous to Carter taking office to be able to really disassociate from the shah. Carter inherited an impossible situation, dating back to 1953 and Mossadegh’s removal.<sup>82</sup>

The hostage crisis proved as difficult a problem as the revolution. What began as a “symbolic measure” lasting two days, the attack on the United States embassy became a vehicle by which the Ayatollah Khomeini consolidated his power.<sup>83</sup> America was more valuable to him as an enemy than as a friend. At the same time, the Carter presidency was badly weakened, causing him to lose the 1980 election to Ronald Reagan. Although Carter tried to build a relationship with Iran after the Shah’s exit from Iran, the efforts collapsed in November 1979 when the administration allowed the Shah into the country for medical treatment. The decision was a difficult one – Carter had no wish to see the shah playing tennis while his wife shopped, knowing that this would be disastrous. When it became obvious that America was the only country with the medical skill and equipment to treat the Shah, Carter gave the go-ahead for his entry. The embassy in

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<sup>81</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 355; see also Tom J. Farer, “Searching for Defeat,” *Foreign Policy* 40, Tenth Anniversary (fall 1980): 155-174.

<sup>82</sup> Smith, *Morality, Reason & Power*, 188; Douglas Brinkley, “The Rising Stock of Jimmy Carter” see also James F. Goode, *The United States and Iran: In the Shadow of Mussadiq* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997) for a discussion of Iran 1951-1963..

<sup>83</sup> Nazila Fathi, “Hostage taker decries Ahmadinejad’s tactics,” *New York Times* reprinted in the *Virginian-Pilot* Sunday, November 5, 2006; see also Michael Ledeen and William Lewis, *Debauchery* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1981) for a discussion on the myriad problems the administration faced.



Tehran was overrun shortly thereafter. This chapter argues that the hostage crisis was as successful as it could have been, given the circumstances, in spite of the failure of the rescue mission.<sup>84</sup> Iran lost at least \$10 billion of its assets that were frozen in the United States, and all hostages came out alive; the Iranian army was in disarray, there were no spare parts being shipped, and Iraq invaded in early 1980.

## CONCLUSIONS

Each president inherits a set of circumstances from his predecessors. Each president should be evaluated on the way he handles the issues and the outcomes that ensue. Carter is no exception. Each issue of the work will be evaluated on the immediate outcomes, both at the regional and strategic levels, and evaluated as well on the long term effects; that is, from the perspective of what we know now. The general framework will be the role of power and principle in the administration, how they sometimes worked together and sometimes clashed. No policy is one hundred percent success and the concluding portion will evaluate the overall success/failure of the administration based on the following criteria.

Success is a slippery and ephemeral concept, but is usually defined in terms of favorable outcomes. Costs and benefits should be considered when evaluating success. In every foreign policy issue, the United States must correctly identify its national interests, and distinguish between vital and non-vital interests. Policy relevant knowledge is essential in order to choose among the options presented. As a superpower,

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<sup>84</sup>For a discussion on Foreign policy decision making see Betty Glad, "Personality, Political and Group Process Variables in Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Jimmy Carter's Handling of the Iranian Hostage Crisis," *International Political Science Review* 10 (January 1989): 35-61; Vance adamantly opposed any rescue mission, See *Hard Choices*, 409; see also R.K. Ramazani, *The United States and Iran: The Patterns of Influence* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982) for a description of the difficulties in analyzing the Iranian situation.

the United States should use power wisely; that is, the policy is rational, judicious, and prudent. Force should be used as a last resort, and should be commensurate with the goals and purpose of the policy, and its efficacy in achieving them. It is important to estimate its usefulness accurately and in ways that facilitate comparison with nonmilitary techniques. The effects on allies and adversaries alike, the trade-offs among competing national interests, and the costs to both the United States and the target must all be considered in assessing the overall success of a technique of statecraft.<sup>85</sup>

Evaluating effectiveness in accomplishing goals is a necessary but not sufficient ingredient in measuring success, and goal attainment is usually a matter of degree. The issue areas will all be evaluated for success or failure, and the overall general goals of the administration will also be evaluated. These four policy goals, as stated earlier are first, the United States would no longer automatically equate its interests with the survival of right-wing dictatorships against their domestic opponents, even those with Marxist leanings. Second, it would be cooler to regimes that grossly violated human rights, and would not overlook these violations just because a government claimed to be anticommunist. Third it would establish working business relations with non-aligned nations on the left that were willing to conduct their economic affairs in a way that was not harmful to the West. Fourth, it would treat Third World states on their own merits, as legitimate negotiating partners, not just as pawns in the East-West competition. Finally, a concern for human rights was a thread that ran through all of the specific issues that Carter tackled.

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<sup>85</sup> See David A. Baldwin, "Success and Failure in Foreign Policy," *Annual Review of Political Science* 3 (2000): 167-182.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### INTRODUCTION

No observer of American foreign policy can doubt that President Jimmy Carter was a moral man, guided by his Christian beliefs in both his private and public life. Although commonly viewed as a failure, especially during the time he served as president, Jimmy Carter should be re-evaluated in light of what we know now. He was often accused of being weak and vacillating, and a micromanager, but a study of some of his achievements as president reveals a highly principled man of surprising strength, tenacity, and fairness; with numerous achievements. Many policy makers want to pursue *either* an idealistic foreign policy *or* one driven by power alone, but the most successful policies over the long term incorporate both. One of the goals of this work is to show the difficulty that any president faces when trying to incorporate both power *and* principle into his policies. This literature review attempts to examine the roots of American liberal principles, which can be found in the notion of American exceptionalism; and also to appraise the concept of power, which has been discussed in the political world at least since the time of the ancient Greeks. Two competing paradigms emerge: the pursuit of power politics versus the desire to engage in a moral, idealistic foreign policy.

During the twentieth century Wilsonian idealism was gradually displaced by the political theory of realism. World War Two seemed to confirm that nations should never underestimate the seamier side of human nature, and should pursue power politics above all else; the same approach the Europeans had used for hundreds of years. Political

realism might be defined as a school of thought that includes “international anarchy, the dominance of state actors in international politics, and the primacy of power as the currency and goal of their efforts.”<sup>1</sup> Many began to scoff at, then discard, Enlightenment ideas of natural laws that supposedly operated in politics. In the scholarly literature, realists put morality at the periphery if international relations, but the politicians sometimes discounted it entirely. A look at the record, however, will reveal that Wilsonian idealism did not die by the hand of the Treaty of Versailles, nor at the outbreak of World War Two; rather these were the very principles used to rebuild Europe after the guns fell silent in 1945. The Vietnam War, however, proved to be quicksand for the US, and it came to be viewed as highly immoral, which tarnished the reputation of the nation. By employing both power and principle in his policy making, Carter is credited with bringing morality and ethics back into American foreign policy after the country lost its way, one of the overarching goals of his administration.

America has a political landscape peppered with religion and morality, and has commonly viewed itself as being an exceptional national state, unlike other Great Powers. The United States created a government and a nation based on the liberal principles of the Enlightenment, articulated by men such as John Locke, Adam Smith, and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Religion, especially Protestantism, has helped to shape the American character and culture. It has influenced how Americans view themselves as God’s chosen people; and how they perceive it to be their duty to spread their values throughout the world.

Americans believe its system of self government and capitalism is better than that of others; its history is God’s will unfolding; and its people possess a humanitarian

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Magee, “Grand Strategy Analysis,” 82.

impulse. There is a genuine desire to spread freedom and democracy, and it claims little in the way of territorial ambitions, at least in today's world; but this has not always been the case. The United States would stand up for justice and fair play, but would also try to avoid becoming entangled in the affairs of others, except for trade. In other words, the nation believes it was and is exceptional, guided by God, that it is a beacon on the hill for others. To paraphrase Herman Melville's words, America is the ark carrying the liberties of the world. One part of this literature review will examine in some detail the roots and philosophic foundations of American exceptionalism its connection to the Judeo-Christian tradition and ethics that has often been prevalent in America's approach to foreign policy.

Throughout its history, the United States has not always acted on its principles, but has wielded its power in ways that have sometimes mirrored the tough, self interested policies of the greatest of the great imperial powers. The most successful foreign policies, however, such as the Marshall Plan, combine both power and principle. The Marshall Plan was successfully carried out using United States power to achieve principles which were in the interests of the nation, such as economic growth, free trade, and democracy and human rights in Western Europe. The literature review will also examine power and how it has been used to achieve foreign policy goals, and will identify assumptions about principles and power and other factors that underpin American foreign policy.

#### AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

Religion has been intertwined in American society since the arrival of the separating Puritans at Plymouth Rock and the non-separating Puritans who settled the Massachusetts Bay Colony. American Puritan thought arose out a sense of *separation*

*and uniqueness* after leaving England and settling in the New World, although their emotional ties to the Old World were still strong, at least initially. They believed they were charged with a special spiritual and political destiny: to create a church and a society that would provide a model for all nations, even as they struggled to reform themselves (a redeemer nation). America was the last chance offered by God to a fallen human race. His exceptional new church offered redemption. Thus, America and Americans are exceptional or special, charged with the mission of saving the world from itself.<sup>2</sup> When they completed their “errand in the wilderness” they would bring this reformed church back to England and Scotland. As Perry Miller, a great scholar of Puritan thought explained, the Puritan migration “was no retreat from Europe: it was a flank attack.” The “large unspoken assumption in the errand of 1630” was that success in New England would mean a return to old England.”<sup>3</sup>

In early America the ultimate authority in both political and religious spheres was God’s word, and the commitments made to the community and the congregations ensured a functional system of religious and political governance. Many were interested in promoting freedom and equality based on religious experiences as individuals and congregations. Since a person could be released from his covenant only by the concurrence of the local church, this ensured a high degree of stability for New England towns. Church and state were deeply intertwined and religion played a large role in daily life.

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<sup>2</sup>Deborah L. Madsen, *American Exceptionalism*, (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 2.

<sup>3</sup>Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956), 11. See also, Perry Miller, *Nature’s Nation*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967.)

The Puritans were products of the Protestant Reformation, the upheaval that shattered the universalism of a world governed by one church. Supposedly the state was now to replace the church as the arbiter of morality. Hobbes' *Leviathan*, written at the time of the English civil war, also influenced the ideas of the Puritans. He wrote not only about power, but also about morality, although many readers ignore this aspect of his work. He believed that to think philosophically is to reason; that philosophy is reasoning. What differentiates man from beast are religion and the ability to reason.<sup>4</sup> His moral doctrine or moral philosophy might be summed up by this quote:

Moral philosophy is nothing else but the science of what is *good*, and *evil*, in the conversation, and society of mankind...*Justice, gratitude, modesty, mercy*, and the rest of the laws of nature are good; that is to say; *moral virtues*; and their contrary *vices*, evil. Now the science of virtue and vice is moral philosophy; and therefore the true doctrine of the laws of nature, is the true moral philosophy. (E.W., iii, p. 146.)<sup>5</sup>

Within the framework of civil society, God's kingdom added a religious character to civil obligations. This extended to the sovereign as well as the subject, but Hobbes does not admit that the sovereign might refuse to obey moral obligations.<sup>6</sup> The idealists, or utopians as they were often called, disagreed that the ruler of the state should be the arbiter of morality and ethics, and over time turned to the secular "law of nature" whose source was human reason; reason could determine what the universally valid moral laws were.<sup>7</sup>

When the Puritans embarked on their journey to the New World, they believed that the church they created would become a model for the Anglican Church as well as

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Edited with an Introduction by Michael Oakeshott, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), xxviii, xxxii,

<sup>5</sup> David P. Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) 28. All quotations from Hobbes in this book are from *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Sir William Molesworth, 11 vols., London, 1839-45. E.W. iii abbreviates *English Works*, vol. iii.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>7</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, xxviii.

for European churches. When Cromwell came to power in England after the civil war, his toleration infused a sense a betrayal in New England, as did the restoration of the monarchy a few years later. New Englanders began to think that perhaps they had failed in their “errand” that God had given them. The expansion of the population, many of whom were non-Puritan, as well as the expansion of trade and the pursuit of secular interests, placed the spiritual mission under pressure. Eventually, America became the burial ground for the strict and rigid Calvinism model. The new world was too vast for their asceticism. The North American wilderness offered freedom, dissent, and independence, not control, obedience, and self-restraint. But by the close of the seventeenth century a particular way of thinking about New England as God’s New Israel or chosen people, selected for an exceptional destiny, had taken hold. Later this attitude was absorbed by all of America.<sup>8</sup>

Many historians find a connection between Puritanism, capitalism, democracy, and science. Leo F. Solt<sup>9</sup> argues that since the Puritans rejected the authority of both the Roman and the Anglican churches, this opened the door for a widespread sense of individualism, derived from the Bible, and a true equality of the saints, based on the priesthood of all believers. This antiauthoritarian bias, along with the notion of covenant, led to a different kind of church organization. The idea of a covenant or contract between God and his elect who would enter heaven, pervaded Puritan theology and social relationships; and the concept of covenant provided a convenient way to organize churches. Many of the Puritans organized their churches into self-sufficient and self-regulating congregations. Members had a contract with both God and each other. This

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<sup>8</sup> Madsen, 12-13; Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 8.

<sup>9</sup> Leo F. Solt, “Puritanism, Capitalism, Democracy, and the New Science,” *The American Historical Review* 73 (October 1967): 18-29.



system of interlocking covenants that bound households to each other and to their ministers was mirrored in the organization of towns. Adult male church members could vote. The covenant led to the social contract as well as the business contract. The equality of believers in Christ led to the equality of men as political animals. One can conclude, then, that Puritan thought introduced the early ideas of liberalism: freedom, equality, democracy, and the social contract, all overlaid by a sense of morality.<sup>10</sup> New England, however, moved over time toward a separation between church and state; in economics this meant freedom from state regulation; and in science it meant the freedom of the natural world from divine intervention.<sup>11</sup>

The Navigation Acts, which regulated trade between the colonies and England and elsewhere, were passed during the era of the British Commonwealth and were much despised by most Americans, Puritan or not. Virginia, settled by Anglicans devoted to the king, hated these acts. For example, while religion was largely lacking in the motives for coming to Virginia, the economic incentive was strong. Tobacco, not religion, played a large role in how the colony developed, with the settlers anxious to throw off the yoke of mercantilism. Under the Navigation Acts tobacco trade was heavily regulated, and Virginians routinely turned to smuggling. The shipping communities throughout North America united both the tobacco kings of Virginia and the River Gods of Boston in their anger over the enforcement provisions of the acts, which granted blanket search warrants to British customs officials and routinely tried smugglers in Admiralty Courts, without juries, and usually with a change in venue. The society that took root in the Chesapeake

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<sup>10</sup> See Tod Lindberg, *The Political Teachings of Jesus*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007) for an interesting discussion on the political meanings of Jesus' teachings.

<sup>11</sup>Solt, "Puritanism, Capitalism, Democracy, and the New Science," 18-20; see Christopher Hill, "William Harvey and the Idea of Monarchy," *Past and Present* 27 (April 1964): 54-72.

Bay area had as much or more influence on the evolution of American society and foreign policy as the Puritans because of their “aggressive expansionism, acquisitive materialism, and an overarching ideology of civilization that encouraged and justified both.” The boom years that came to Virginia by the mid-seventeenth century produced an almost lawless capitalism run amok and a system of labor that treated men and women as things.<sup>12</sup> These issues, as well as the geographical separation of the colonials from England, accelerated the building of a new nation; and over time this nation was born, created by youthful men and women who came for a variety of different reasons. The overarching motivation among all the diverse groups who came was to find a better life that was unobtainable under the system of the Old World.<sup>13</sup> They were aggressive expansionists from the beginning, but never considered themselves as imperialist because from their perspective they were simply defending themselves against the French, Spanish, and Indians, all of whom wanted domination of North America.<sup>14</sup> The Anglo-Americans were spreading European civilization, not escaping from it. It was America’s destiny to become the “new Athens.” Thucydides tells how the Corinthians described Athens in the fifth century B.C. as a people always on the move, restless and unrelenting in their quest for opportunity. They were “incapable of either living a quiet life themselves or of allowing anyone else to do so.” If the Athenians aimed “at something and do not get it, they think that they have been deprived of what belonged to them

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<sup>12</sup> Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*, 10; Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975), 129.

<sup>13</sup> See Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution before 1776* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.)

<sup>14</sup> See William Appleman Williams, “The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy,” *Pacific Historical Review* 24 (November 1955): 379-95.

already; whereas, if their enterprise is successful, they regard that success as nothing compared to what they will do next.”<sup>15</sup> Americans felt the same way.

As the nation grew from colonials to revolutionaries to independent citizens, the United States of America dared to experiment in the most philosophically advanced form of government, representative democracy, a system thought to be unworkable by most. Its ideals and principles were rooted in the ideology of liberalism and specified in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, which articulated specific rights for a nation that was to be the most free on the earth. The United States was founded on Enlightenment ideas, its idealism was essentially individualist; and it was *exceptional*.

The United States was determined not to be drawn into further European wars – it had already fought in four of them, first as colonies, then as revolutionaries. Unfortunately, the Europeans quarreled once more over French expansionist policy which grew out of the French Revolution. The country was drawn into the fight twice, the first time in 1798 against the French, the second time in 1812 against the British. But when the warfare stopped, finally, in 1815, Europe experienced a century of peace and America was left alone, at last, to seek its destiny. Free from the snake pit of corruption, Europe, and eager to show that it was different, America went its own way, spreading its principles, even as it built an empire, across the continent. Although the United States conquered much of North America, displacing a number of Mexican and Amerindian nations, its people denied that this was an empire. After all, they reasoned, the conquered territories eventually became states within the United States. Empire building and

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<sup>15</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 2 vols. (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985), 1:70.

American exceptionalism are two contradictory strains in the American psyche, and this affects United States foreign policy to this day – power versus principle.

The tenacity of land hunger as well as pressure on all who shared the hemisphere with the US, intimated the formation of a national characteristic which would prove to be lasting: “the expression of a vital impulse in the name of an ideal.” Over time, the original sense of mission transformed into a sense of responsibility. Assuming the responsibilities of power meant that the nation had to deal with moral ambiguities in the political world, exemplified in the 1970s by the “balance of terror.”<sup>16</sup> These ambiguities bedeviled numerous presidents and policy makers in the twentieth century.

By the mid-nineteenth century intellectuals anticipated the perfection of democratic institutions, and the rhetoric had changed from the time of the Puritans who had anticipated an exceptional destiny based on the perfection of ecclesiastical institutions. America would now be the global champion of democracy and the guardian of political values. Standing in its way of achieving its mission were numerous Indian nations and Mexico. Taking a large portion of Mexico ran counter to the ideology of Manifest Destiny. Prior to the revolt in Texas, the United States acquired additional territory through negotiation (Transcontinental Treaty 1819) or purchase (Louisiana). Texas was taken by violence and bloodshed; and instead of bringing freedom to an oppressed people, the United States supported slavery in the new state; and instead of uniting the country, this began to tear it apart.<sup>17</sup> The annexation of Texas meant war with

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<sup>16</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr and Alan Heimert, *A Nation So Conceived*, (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1963) 9, 12; see also, Perry Miller, *Nature's Nation*, especially Ch. 1, “The Shaping of the American Character.”

<sup>17</sup> See Howard R. Lamar, “Westward Expansion: An Overview,” in William H. Truettner, ed., *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Museum of American Art, 1991), 9-14.

Mexico. Mexico's defeat led to the acquisition of Texas, California, and everything in between. Large populations of Hispanics and Indians became a part of the United States.

John C. Calhoun, Senator from South Carolina, opposed the incorporation of Mexican territory into the US, primarily based on the grounds of the racial intermixing that would occur. On January 4, 1848, he compared the situation to the attitude of the United States towards conquered Indian tribes. He argued that America never entertained the idea of incorporating the Indians, saying that "they have either been left an independent people amongst us, or been driven into the forests."<sup>18</sup> Calhoun further argued that "free popular government" is not to be found among the "colored races." He believed that not everyone was capable of free government and to force it on an unwilling population was a grave error. For Calhoun, America had a racial mission that superseded its mission articulated by exceptionalism. He, in turn, was answered by Senator John A. Dix of New York. Dix argued that the course of American empire was inevitable; and, although he did not favor incorporating the Indian and Mexican populations into the US, the claim to the land outweighed other considerations. He pointed to the expansion of the population and said that there could be no doubt that it would fill up the land from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The incorporation of Mexico had to happen in order to open up the additional territory to satisfy the land hunger of Americans. American expansion was driven by Manifest Destiny, and directed by divine Providence. Providence would overcome idleness, ignorance, and barbarism, and would replace it with industry, knowledge, and civilization.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Senator John C. Calhoun, from *The Congressional Globe*, 30<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 4 January 1848, in Milner, Butler, and Lewis, eds, *Major Problems in the History of the American West*, 160.

<sup>19</sup> John A. Dix, from *The Congressional Globe*, in Milner, Butler, and Lewis, 163.

Defeating the Indians brought no glory to the new nation; no honor could be found in fighting a weak and poorly equipped people. It could be found, however, in taking responsibility for them. The very inequality of the relationship imposed certain responsibilities, a kind of inverted Athenian logic at Melos. The United States would bring them the “blessings of civilization,” reconciling ambition with honor, power with morality. To those forced to submit to its power, the country would also bring liberal ideology. This did not carry through in practice, however, and over time the Americans, and the mission to bring the “blessings of civilization” ultimately failed. Americans looked away from the contradictions of Indian policy, which promised the Indians justice on the one hand and the settlers their land on the other.<sup>20</sup>

The West, in general, has become mythologized by Americans. The single best statement on this is the Turner Thesis, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” articulated in 1894 at an address to the annual meeting of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. It was the return to the primitive, constant re-births, and it meant the fluidity of social institutions and continued development, and this came to dominate the American national character. The Great West now best described the American nation. The process of transformation from corrupt European to perfected American had been central to New World mythology from its earliest days, and the Turner Thesis now offered historical justification for a concept of the West that was now informed by the imperialist assumptions of the ideology of Manifest Destiny.<sup>21</sup> It was a meeting of savagery and civilization, of power and principle, and it had lasting implications for the twentieth century. Arguments were often settled by either fists or guns, but Americans

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<sup>20</sup> Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*, 91.

<sup>21</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” (1894) in Milner, Butler and Lewis, 2.

managed to tame the wilderness once again. There was a fundamental conflict between the power of the gun and the principles of civilization. It was expressed by Paul Newman in the 1972 film *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean*:

This is going to be a new place, a good place to live. I am the new judge. There will be law. There will be order, civilization, progress and peace. Above all, peace. I don't care who I have to kill to get it.<sup>22</sup>

The Spanish-American War was a gigantic coming out party for the United States. By 1898 the country had tested the international waters with aggressive encounters with Germany, Britain, Canada, and Chile. The “Popeye” archetype was in full swing<sup>23</sup> with the nation feeling that it had to expand or burst. Cuban unrest provided a perfect opportunity. There is no doubt that Spain was a cruel and inept colonial master, having been in decline since 1588, and the Cubans had revolted against its rule several times in the nineteenth century. Spain responded by rounding up Cuban men and incarcerating them in concentration camps (*reconcentrados*), causing enormous suffering. It was a humanitarian nightmare and the island was highly unstable. Theodore Roosevelt, the assistant secretary of the navy at the time, wanted war. President William McKinley devised a plan to ask for \$500,000 from Congress for relief of the *reconcentrados*. The delivery of the supplies would require Spain to stop fighting and open the camps. If Spain refused, McKinley would ask for Congressional authority for military action. Under these circumstances, “his conscience and the world [would] justify” armed intervention.<sup>24</sup> Various European countries hovered around the island, like vultures in the minds of Americans, so the United States sent the battleship *Maine* to Havana harbor “to

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Kim Newman, *Wild West Movies: How the West was Found, Won, Lost, Lied About, Filmed and Forgotten* (London: Bloomsbury, 1990), epigram.

<sup>23</sup> See Stanley Hoffmann, “Requiem.”

<sup>24</sup> John L. Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895-1898* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 136.

protect American lives and interests.” When it exploded, killing 266 officers and men, The country blamed Spain. This provided the perfect opportunity for war. McKinley probably did not want war, but he was prepared to go to war to achieve what he believed was a moral and humanitarian imperative.<sup>25</sup> The war was highly popular because it involved American ideals, interests, prejudices, and power. That so much suffering could go on so close to the United States was intolerable, especially if America had the power to do something about it. Power and principle came together for the war, but an inherent contradiction soon showed itself in the provisions of the Teller and Platt Amendments. The Teller Amendment, attached to the American declaration of war, said that the United States would not take Cuba as a colony; the Platt Amendment, passed by Congress in 1901, laid out the provisions of the protectorate that the United States established over the island. Men such as Henry Cabot Lodge spoke of the island’s strategic location, especially after a canal was built to join the two oceans, as well as of the American commercial interests. Others justified the amendment on the grounds that the Cubans were not yet capable of self government, and needed the guidance of the US. The Platt Amendment left very little in the way of sovereignty to Cuba. The United States wrote the rules that wove a web entangling Cuba into a dependency relationship.<sup>26</sup> More than a century later, the two nations are still estranged and power and principle are not reconciled. The 1898 war reflected Americans’ view of themselves as the vanguard of civilization, standing firm against barbarism.

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<sup>25</sup> Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*, 406.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas G. Paterson, *Contesting Castro* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7; Louis A. Perez, Jr., *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).



World War One tested the limits of idealism and liberalism, with unimaginable savagery becoming the norm in the trenches of France and Belgium, but when the war ended the international community demonstrated its willingness, on the one hand, to apply an idealistic and exceptional answer to Europe's repeated attempts at suicide. On the other hand, it punished Germany, and tried to make it pay for the war. Although never agreeing to Wilson's Fourteen Points, it did accept the premise of the League of Nations, an international organization designed to settle international quarrels peacefully. The United States, however, never embraced the League, at least not fully; but Wilsonian principles have endured: self-determination, democratic government, collective security, international law, and a league of nations. Wilson's vision is now accepted as fundamental in post World War Two Europe.<sup>27</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, a noted theologian, however, thought that if there was a way out of endless conflict, it would not be as easy as the moralists had assumed.<sup>28</sup>

#### OF POWER AND PRINCIPLE

The contradictions between power and principles have continued in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with implications for United States foreign policy. Realists think that power is the most important element in a successful foreign policy; idealists believe the country must also maintain its principles. The realist view that no ethical standards apply to the relations between states can be traced back at least to Machiavelli. According to Stanley Hoffman two archetypes are in competition: the "Popeye" archetype of the United States as the guardian of stability and law and order through

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<sup>27</sup> Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 9 and ch. 2 "The Kaleidoscope of American Foreign Policy," 30-55.

<sup>28</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1932; First Touchstone Ed., 1995), 110.

military strength, and the missionary archetype that believes the richest nation on earth should help the poor and oppressed, while bringing American values to the underprivileged. Neither archetype fits.<sup>29</sup>

In his critique of the utopians in 1939 E.H. Carr asserted that “No political utopia will achieve even the most limited success unless it grows out of political reality.” His work inspired a school of international relations inquiry in the US, and the ideology of realism gradually displaced idealism as war once again broke out. Carr also reminds us that both the ancient Greeks and the medieval scholars identified natural law with reason, and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this association was revitalized in a new form. In science, reason discovered the laws of nature through observation and deductive thinking. An easy parallel to Newtonian principles was now applied to moral issues. According to scientific and Enlightenment thinkers, moral laws could be scientifically established. Rationality took the place of divine revelation and intuition. The idealists believed that once these laws were discovered, mankind would adhere to them, just as the universe followed the physical laws of nature. The idealist vision of the world assumed that objective and observable laws rooted in reason must govern politics and society. Humans, if they so desire, can make a stable, peaceful international order by applying reason and science. War, therefore, was a dishonorable method of statecraft. However, it was the evil side of human nature that had led to the failed peace in the interwar years, and leaders needed to look more realistically at the realities of mankind. For many scholars, the events of the first half of the twentieth century seemed to belie that politics was governed by immutable laws; it was dominated by mankind’s all too fallible nature.

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<sup>29</sup> Hoffmann, “Requiem;” E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis 1919-1939*, 153.

Although man was not totally corrupt his imperfections often dominated.<sup>30</sup> Realists generally ignore Wilson's lasting ideals that were eventually put into place in Europe, beginning with Harry Truman.

The post-war world itself seemed to reflect the dual nature of humanity, with its divisions into two spheres of influence. The United States and the Soviet Union stared at each other down the barrel of a gun, with each side believing that the other was the evil empire. The United States gained the most from World War Two. It entered the war later than any other great power, lost fewer lives in the fighting, realized greater gains from the post-war settlement than any other country. And, under the leadership of Harry Truman, it helped to manage the beginning of a remarkable transformation of Western Europe. By finding the right balance of power and principle, the country began to rebuild the western half of the Continent both economically and politically. Marshall Plan aid helped to restore a region that was down, but not out; and with a prod (or perhaps a shove) from the US, the western states began to build institutions together that eventually entangled them in a web so tightly knit that there was, seemingly, no escape. Wilson's vision came to fruition.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, the United States never took its eyes off of the Soviet Union and began to take on a much more global role than it had at the end of World War One. The mantle of power had seemingly been thrust on a reluctant nation, turning it into a lone policeman, truly the ark that carried the freedom of the world. The United States had enormous military power, as witnessed by the two atomic bombs dropped on Japan in the closing days of World War Two; and it could use this as an

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<sup>30</sup>Patrick Magee, "Grand Strategy Analysis:," 72-73; Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 22; see also Terry Nardin and David R. Mapel, eds., *Traditions of International Ethics* (Cambridge: University Press, 2002.)

<sup>31</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 10-11.

implicit threat. Its mission was to use its power to promote the good of the world, which meant, essentially, blocking Soviet expansion. It would create a Pax Americana. It signaled its intent to protect Western Europe by the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and by placing nuclear weapons on the Continent. The Truman Doctrine and the Point Four Program enlarged the mission to include Greece, Turkey, and lesser developed countries. The country fought in Korea under the United Nations flag and in Vietnam under the American flag to protect the world from the spread of monolithic communism. The fighting in Korea ended, however, where it had begun, at the thirty-eighth parallel; not with peace but with only a truce, and the conflict in Vietnam became like an ever growing bog of quicksand, sucking the nation's power and principles. Massacres such as My Lai outraged Americans and drove most of a generation of young people, those most affected by the war, to rise up against it. America, it seemed, had lost its way. The climate of fear generated by the McCarthy era had discouraged dissent from American foreign policy, and the result was the gradual, inescapable, intervention in a local civil war. The failure to de-link "monolithic" International communism from the Soviet Union led the country into the most traumatic and tragic warfare since the American Civil War. It destroyed the social fabric of South Vietnam, leaving one third of its population refugees and its landscape scarred by 21 million bomb craters – a country for which the United States had taken responsibility. The enormity of the disaster traumatized the United States, and the government was forced to change course. The 1976 election offered the voters a choice between a Ford-Kissinger business as usual, or a new kind of candidate, one deeply steeped in the Christian ethic – Jimmy Carter. He promised that United States power and influence

would be based once again on American moral and ethical principles. It would be used to create a “stable, just, and peaceful world order.”<sup>32</sup> Carter tried to use American principles as a *source* of power. He falls within the Wilsonian school of foreign policy, being both a moralist and a globalist. In some instances he was seemingly faced with an either/or situation: *either* power *or* principle; but he tried to find a middle way, incorporating both power and principle into policy. He was the first to do this after the debacle of Vietnam.

### *Christianity and American Principles*

As Walter Russell Mead has pointed out, Christians come in various stripes, and there is a great deal of difference among the evangelical, the fundamentalist, and the liberal view of Christianity, which leads to different ideas about the role of America in the world. Fundamentalists are pessimistic about the prospects for peace and order in the world, and see a basic and unbridgeable divide between believers and non-believers. Liberals, on the other hand, are much more optimistic about the future, and see little difference between Christians and non-Christians. The evangelicals fall somewhere in between. During much of the middle of the twentieth century, the liberal view dominated the thinking of foreign policy elites. Leaders such as Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Dean Acheson, Dwight Eisenhower, and John Foster Dulles were steeped in this tradition. Evidently, the problem with liberal Christianity today is that it is too liberal for some people. These Christians tend to “evanesce into secularism: members follow the ‘Protestant principle’ right out the door of the church,” and as a result, their

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<sup>32</sup> George Herring, *America's Longest War*, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1979; Jimmy Carter, “Message From the President (Carter) to People of Other Nations on Assuming Office, January 20, 1977,” Document 24, U. S. Department of State, *American Foreign Policy Basic Documents, 1977-1980* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1983), 1, hereinafter cited as *AFP*.)

denominations are shrinking. While these Christians may support environmental issues, or Amnesty International, these activities take place outside of the church. It is curious that taking Christian principles into the world and living by them would alienate many “Christians.” Indeed, Jesus’ political teachings are an account of universal freedom and equality, which must be available to all of mankind if His teachings are to be fulfilled.<sup>33</sup> The liberals, according to Mead, have also alienated Roman Catholics by their stand on abortion and gay rights, and Jews by their decreasing support of Israel. Consumed by internal battles over these issues as well, they are less able to influence society. Evangelicals seem to have found the “middle way.” Their core beliefs share common roots with fundamentalism, but their ideas about the world have been heavily influenced by traditional American optimism.<sup>34</sup> This is the path that Carter has followed in his life.

Carter was born and raised as a Southern Baptist, and as such believed that the words and actions of Jesus Christ are the criteria by which the Bible, in its entirety, is to be interpreted.<sup>35</sup> Baptists were opposed to dominance over individuals by pastors or other such powerful people, and believed that people were empowered only to serve others, by alleviating suffering and espousing truth, forgiveness, and love. Every believer was priest; and local pastors were the servants, not the masters, of their congregations. As evangelicals, the Southern Baptists were committed to a strong global mission to share the Christian faith with all other people without discrimination or prejudice. They could fulfill this mission either directly and personally or through financial support. During most of Carter’s life it was assumed that the Baptist churches in the South would

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<sup>33</sup> Lindberg, *The Political Teachings of Jesus*, 235-36.

<sup>34</sup> Walter Russell Mead, “God’s Country?” *Foreign Affairs*, (September/October 2006): 24-43.

<sup>35</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Our Endangered Values*, esp. Ch. 2, “My Traditional Christian Faith,” 16-29,

be members of the Southern Baptist Convention, a body which coordinated the missionary work.

One of the strongest commitments of this association of churches was the separation of church and state. While individuals were free to engage in political affairs, the concept of entire congregations becoming involved was repugnant. In addition, these Baptists believed in religious freedom, compassion for unbelievers and respect for all persons as being equal before God. Carter defines “evangelical” as “... Christians, especially of the late 1970s, eschewing the designation of fundamentalist but holding to a conservative interpretation of the Bible.” His mother and wife were Methodists and he assumed that equally devout Christians could have different forms of worship and organizational structures and still practice their faith in harmony. He finds it disturbing to hear prominent Baptists of today, such as Pat Robertson, make statements such as, “You say you’re supposed to be nice to the Episcopalians and the Presbyterians and the Methodists and this, that, and the other thing. Nonsense. I don’t have to be nice to the spirit of the Antichrist.”<sup>36</sup>

Carter was always faithful to his beliefs as president. In his public life, he kept church and state separate, but privately he brought his faith with him wherever he went. For example, one story he tells concerned the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, the person he negotiated with to normalize diplomatic relations between the People’s Republic of China and the United States. When Deng visited America the two men had a number of wide-ranging talks about Chinese and American life. When asked what had first inspired Carter’s interest in China, Carter said that as a child he had given five cents per month to support Christian missionaries in China. Deng was amused and reminded Carter that

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<sup>36</sup> Pat Robertson, *The 700 Club*, quoted in Jimmy Carter *Our Endangered Values*, 20.

these activities were now forbidden in China. Carter asked if it might be possible to change the policies, and Deng promised to permit the distribution of Bibles and to provide for religious freedom. Within three years he kept the promises, provided that any new church would register with the government. It is typical that Carter never tried to take political advantage of these conversations. They were private and Carter honored the confidentiality during the lifetimes of the foreign officials with whom he discussed Christianity.

On all levels, Carter has actively sought to live his faith. Unlike popular preachers of the latter nineteenth century who claimed that “it is your Christian duty to get rich,”<sup>37</sup> he tried to live the precepts that Jesus taught. For example, he defines success as follows:

I believe that anyone can be successful in life, regardless of natural talent or the environment within which we live. This is not based on measuring success by human competitiveness for wealth, possessions, influence, and fame, but adhering to God’s standards of truth, justice, humility, service, compassion, forgiveness, and love.

These are some of the values that informed his presidency. Others include the protection of life, an emphasis on peace, the restraint of violence, the preservation of religious liberty, the safeguarding of human rights and the protection of the environment.

Recent years have seen huge changes in the balance of religious power in the US. As mainstream Christian denominations decrease in numbers, membership in the evangelical churches rises. The Southern Baptist Convention has gained more than seven million members, becoming the nation’s largest Protestant denomination. Carter, however, left this association when it substituted Southern Baptist leaders for Jesus as the

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<sup>37</sup> Russell Conwell, “Acres of Diamonds,” in Frances M. Jacobson, Constance Jones, and Derris Raper, eds., *Voices From History* (Boston: Bedford St. Martin’s, 2005), 109.



interpreters of Biblical Scripture. This change soon became mandatory on all convention officers, employees, deans and professors of colleges and seminaries, and even missionaries serving in foreign countries. It then combined with domination by all-male pastors, the exclusion of traditional Baptists from convention affairs, the subservience of women, and other elements of the new fundamentalism. Pastors would no longer be servants. There were similar and related changes in the nation's political system, with a parallel right-wing movement within American politics. The new political principles, according to Carter, involve special favors for the powerful at the expense of others; the abandonment of social justice, denigration of those who are different, a lack of stewardship over the environment, a tendency toward unilateral diplomatic action and away from international agreements, an excessive inclination toward conflict, and the reliance on fear as a means of persuasion.<sup>38</sup>

Many evangelicals are becoming much more fundamentalist in their political beliefs and activities, and are experiencing a growing influence. The rise of this movement began during Carter's years as president.

Internationally, fundamentalism has also grown. Carter was personally affected by this phenomenon for the first time when the Ayatollah Khomeini became the leader of Iran and labeled the United States "The Great Satan." Khomeini whipped up fervor for Islamic fundamentalism and anti-Americanism to cement his hold on power by encouraging an attack on the American embassy in Tehran, which resulted in the seizure of embassy personnel who were held in captivity for fourteen months. This was in direct violation of international law, and the traditional teachings of the Koran, especially concerning the treatment of visitors or diplomats from other countries.

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<sup>38</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Our Endangered Values*, 43-44.

Carter was treated to a taste of the new and radical fundamentalism at home as well when the recently elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention visited him in the White House. This visit was routine, especially when the president was a Baptist. As the man and his wife were leaving he urged Carter to abandon “secular humanism.” This was shocking to Carter, who considered himself to be a traditional Baptist. Many of his decisions as president made these right-wing ideologues angry. In the foreign policy realm, Carter appointed too many women in high positions in government, he restored diplomatic relations with Communist China, called for a Palestinian homeland, refused to move the United States embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, negotiated with the Soviet Union on nuclear arms control, returned sovereignty over the Canal to Panama, and encouraged majority rule in Southern Africa, to name a few. Carter, in spite of the condemnation by such groups as Moral Majority, continued to do what was best for the country, which was not necessarily best for his re-election prospects. He was accused of being soft on communism, encouraging abortion and homosexuality, trying to destroy the family because he supported the Equal Rights Amendment, and lowering America’s guard against the Soviet Union by negotiating SALT II. Jerry Falwell, leader of Moral Majority, was one of the most dogged accusers-, being exceedingly careless with the truth. Falwell repeatedly told huge audiences that he had met with Carter in the Oval Office where Carter told him that he had to have homosexuals on his staff because there were homosexuals in the country who needed to be represented in his inner circle. Carter has said that he never met privately with Falwell, Falwell was never in the Oval Office, and there was never any such conversation.<sup>39</sup> Some believe that the message of

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<sup>39</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 571.

Christianity has seemingly been garbled and tainted because of the political stakes involved in winning public office, especially the American presidency.

*Morality and Foreign Policy*

Idealists tend to hold states morally accountable for their actions, just as individuals must be accountable. John Bright said in a speech on foreign policy in 1858 that the moral law was not written for men alone in their individual character, it was written as well for nations.<sup>40</sup> Also, in his war message to Congress in April 1917, Wilson said that “We are at the beginning of a new age in which it will be insisted that the same standards of conduct and of responsibility for wrong shall be observed among nations and their governments that are observed among the individual citizens of civilized states.”<sup>41</sup> The concept of civilization itself seems to imply the idea of certain obligations to mankind. A state that does not conform to certain standards of behavior toward its own citizens and foreigners as well will be branded as “uncivilized.” Even Hitler refused to conclude a pact with Lithuania because, in his view, it was a state that disregarded the most primitive laws of human society.

During the first half of the twentieth century, almost all statesmen, as well as the man on the street, agreed that there is an international moral code that is binding on states. One of the most important elements in this code is the obligation not to impose unnecessary death or suffering on other human beings. This is the foundation of many of the rules of war. However, since the beginning of World War One, the rules of war have faced very exacting tests, and modern conditions of warfare are breaking down a

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<sup>40</sup> John Bright, M.P and James E. Thorold Rogers, *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1868), 479.

<sup>41</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *War Messages*, 65th Cong., 1st Sess. Senate Document. No. 5, Serial No. 7264, (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office), 1917, 3-8, *passim*.

previously existing and effective sense of universal obligation. In addition, the role of morality in international affairs has slowly but remorselessly been banished to the periphery in the study of international relations, a field dominated by realism. This new discipline was born, at least partially, out of Carr's *Twenty Years' Crisis*, and those in this discipline wanted to establish the independence of their school from all ethical and philosophical presuppositions, and to build a value-free science "consisting of formal models in which the preferences of the actors are treated as givens and in which attempts are made at quantifying the multiple unponderables [sic] of international affairs."<sup>42</sup> Realism, the dominant paradigm in the study of international relations, emphasizes the roles of necessity and anarchy in the politics of nations. In this world of intense competition among nations there is "little room for meaningful choice on the part of state decision makers, and even less room for the choice of moral values that conflict with the national interest."<sup>43</sup> In spite of the growing lack of attention to morality in the field of international relations, the field of applied ethics has investigated the moral choices inherent in foreign policy, and offers prescriptions for ethical conduct. However, little in the way of dialogue has ensued between ethical thinkers and students of international affairs. Hans Morgenthau, an early and enduring scholar on realism, saw in early realism the effort to build bridges between theory and practice so that state leaders could build their foreign policies on ethically sound and realistically conceived foundations.<sup>44</sup> This idea has not been widely discussed in realist literature. Realism, rather, emphasizes

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<sup>42</sup> Stanley Hoffmann, *The Political Ethics of International Relations* (New York: Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, 1988), 8.

<sup>43</sup> McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Hans Morgenthau, Introduction to *Ethics and United States Foreign Policy*, by Ernest Lefever (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1967), ix.

power politics almost to the exclusion of ethics. It mounted a serious and growing challenge to the liberal internationalists who emerged after World War One.

*The Liberal Internationalists*

The liberal internationalists believed that the postwar world could be made more stable, more just, and more peaceful than previous epochs in history. They believed that war was caused by patterns of state interaction that could be altered through moral education and collective action. They denied that war was an element of human nature; rather it was part of a political program, an alluring tool of state policy. The old order of power politics had been at the root of almost constant European warfare for any number of centuries; and the liberal internationalists wanted the affairs of the world to be organized in the interests of mankind. This was both a moral and a political question, and an affirmative answer would require both moral and political action. They believed that there were three channels through which moral principles could be incorporated into the relations of national states. None was foolproof, but each offered an opportunity to make foreign policy more moral.

The first of these was domestic public opinion. Most people in the world were committed to peaceful resolution of conflict, and domestic opinion could, at least sometimes, hold state leaders in check. The education of the public was paramount; the public must never again support leaders who advocated warlike or imperialist aims. The second channel was the “courtroom of world opinion” represented by the League of Nations. Publicity about the actions of states was a new weapon which the League possessed, and it could possibly be the most powerful, since most nations cared about their reputations. International condemnation carried enormous weight. The third and

final channel was the individual consciences of state leaders. The liberal internationalists believed that leaders would, at times, follow international moral standards because in conscience they believed such standards to be right. Woodrow Wilson was a prime example of a politician living by moral principles in those days during and after World War One; and Jimmy Carter was the example after the Vietnam War. The liberal internationalists believed that the years after 1918 provided an opportunity to reshape the character of international affairs, and Carter believed the same in the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate.

### *The Realist Challenge*

The intellectual roots of realism can be traced to a theologically based conception of mankind.<sup>45</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr's ideas harken back to Martin Luther with his stress on the sinfulness of humanity and the human desire to deny that sinfulness. In Niebuhr's view, men and women understand their limitations while at the same time deny them. Although they are capable of transcending sin because of their spiritual identity, they are also burdened by their creatureliness. As a result they are in an ambiguous position – they are unwilling to accept their dependency and insecurity. From this unwillingness flows the will to power.

Man is insecure and involved in natural contingency; he seeks to overcome his insecurity by a will-to-power which overreaches the limits of human creatureliness. Man is ignorant and involved in the limitations of a finite mind; but he pretends that he is not limited. He assumes that he can gradually transcend finite limitation until his mind becomes identical with the universal mind. All of his intellectual and cultural pursuits, therefore, become infected with the sin of pride. Man's pride and will-to-power disturb the harmony of creation.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> See Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of Its Traditional Defense* (New York: Scribner, 1949.)

<sup>46</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: Human Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1943), 178-179.

So, the drive for self-transcendence that is capable of uniting humans with God is also the cause of human sinfulness. This is the ultimate ambiguity.<sup>47</sup>

According to Niebuhr, pride and the will for power are demonstrated on three planes. The first is the search for security, which leads mankind to want domination over others. This search is never ending. For the wealthy and powerful, there is a fear of losing all they have; for those less fortunate, especially those who have not attained a modicum of wealth and power, there is a deep sense of deprivation and a desire to redress their grievances. The search for security transforms all human interactions into relations of power and domination.

The second plane is the intellectual plane. As Niebuhr states,

All human knowledge is tainted with an “ideological” taint. It pretends to be more true than it is. It is finite knowledge, gained from a particular perspective; but it pretends to be final and ultimate knowledge. Exactly analogous to the cruder pride of power, the pride of intellect is derived on the one hand from ignorance of the finiteness of the human mind and on the other hand from an attempt to obscure the known conditioned character of human knowledge and the taint of self-interest in human truth.<sup>48</sup>

The most dangerous of the ideologies, in Niebuhr’s view, was Marxism, because while it correctly locates the fallacies in all competing ideologies, it then asserts that it is free from the limitations of human understanding. As a result it is an ideology of power and demonic force.

The moral plane is the final plane on which human pride is expressed. Human moral standards should be seen as provisional and flawed because of the position of ambiguity and sinfulness of man. Moral pride denies this reality, according to Niebuhr,

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<sup>47</sup>Charles Kegley and Robert W. Bretall, eds., *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1956), esp. Edward Wolf, “Niebuhr’s Doctrine of Man,” 229-250.

<sup>48</sup> Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man*, 188-195.

leading many to declare moral absolutes. This leads to hypocrisy and distorts the human search for self-transcendence.

Niebuhr transfers his ideas to the political sphere and accentuates the will for power and security planes. Mankind transfers his individual need for security into a collective drive for power. The nation state is the vehicle. Since no group acts from purely unselfish or even mutual intent, politics is bound to be a contest of power.<sup>49</sup> While love can exert a restraining power on individual relations, is almost totally destroyed in the realm of international politics because of the complexities of the situation, and “The same intellectual analysis which the complex situation requires may actually destroy the force of the benevolent impulse.”<sup>50</sup>

Niebuhr’s arguments not only challenge the idealist notion that humans are not intrinsically warlike, but also undercut the idealist assertions that there are clear international moral norms that, if applied consistently, could gradually change the world into a more humane place. But Niebuhr does not abandon morality completely in the realm of international politics. He argued that there is a residual capacity for justice that would temper competition. “Politics will, to the end of history, be an area where conscience and power meet, where the ethical and coercive factors of human life will interpenetrate and work out their tentative and uneasy compromises.”<sup>51</sup> For the realists, however, the “tentative and uneasy compromises” have emerged not as real compromises between power and principle, but as decisions in which moral values play only a marginal role. Carter, on the other hand, tried to restore the conscience of America in the

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<sup>49</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, “Human Nature and Social Change,” *Christian Century* 50 (1933): 363.

<sup>50</sup> Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* 74.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



way he conducted foreign policy, finding a middle way between power and principle, something that he understood had been missing.

Where Niebuhr provided the anthropology that fueled the realist critique of the liberal internationalists, Carr provided the reflections of a veteran diplomat. He claimed that all states do *not* want the same things; and that the internationalists were primarily of the British and Americans schools who hoped that Anglo-American dominance could be maintained, completely ignoring the aspirations of Germany and other nations. At the time he wrote, the basic divergence was between the status quo powers and the revisionists. This divergence of interests included colonialism, free trade and cultural interactions. Carr pointed out that it was not possible to believe that every state would accept the status quo in the interests of peace any more than every state would accept the revisionist world view in the interests of peace. He thought that it was exceedingly difficult for nations to act on the principle that the good of the whole should take precedence over the good of the individual nation. There is no equality of nations in the international system, and there is little willingness to remedy the disparities. The hypothetical world community does not possess the coherence and unity that the individual parts have. Without this coherence and unity, morality can play only a marginal role.<sup>52</sup>

Carr also disagrees with the liberal internationalists' belief that moral education of the public will make them less susceptible to the machinations of propaganda. Carr's vantage point was 1939, as Fascist and Nazi propaganda machines brought nationalist fervor to new heights. However, he also talks about compromise: "The compromises,

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<sup>52</sup>Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, 162-169.

like solutions of other human problems, will remain uneasy and tentative. But it is an essential part of any compromise that both factors shall be taken into account.”<sup>53</sup>

Hans Morgenthau’s *Politics Among Nations* which was written in 1948 set the parameters for the debate on morality and international relations for many years. Writing at the height of United States power, Morgenthau undercut the moral foundations of American policies by emphasizing their complexity and claiming that all politics is a struggle for power. There is an inherent contradiction between power and ethics, and theories that failed to grasp this would lead to policies that were ethically unsound and diplomatically dangerous. His foundation for this can be found in Niebuhr’s theological anthropology; but as Niebuhr found that the drive for transcendence leads to both selfishness and justice, Morgenthau concluded that it leads only to selfishness and the lust for power. As a result, every human action is tinged with evil.<sup>54</sup>

In spite of these beliefs, Morgenthau believed that an effective international morality had existed in Europe during the nineteenth century which had constrained the drive for power, because it had reflected a European-wide moral and intellectual consensus. In his mind, World War I shattered this consensus as international affairs ceased to be the sole prerogative of the elites and became a sphere in which competing mass-based nationalisms fought each other for supremacy. Even the restraints on total war that had been a hallmark of European civilization for more than a thousand years were abandoned in the search for power. Democracy and nationalism destroyed the moral code.<sup>55</sup> No moral consensus existed in 1918, yet he argued that morality did touch

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<sup>53</sup> Carr, *Twenty Years’ Crisis*, 100-101.

<sup>54</sup> Morgenthau, Introduction to Lefever, *Ethics and United States Foreign Policy*, xv; Hans Morgenthau, *Scientific Man versus Power Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 192-193.

<sup>55</sup> Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 200-221

international affairs. Moral language can be used as a cloak in order to gain legitimacy for a particular policy, for example. He thought that the American people had historically allowed moral language and norms to influence foreign policy in a way different from the usual ideological uses of morality in international affairs. He labeled this tendency “sentimentalism,” and believed that it was misguided and dangerous because the country pursued single moral values such as democracy and liberty at the expense of its national interests.<sup>56</sup>

The pursuit of the national interest is a central tenet of realist thought, but the nature of this duty is seemingly confused. For example, George Kennan, a leading spokesman for realism, argued in 1985 that there is no moral dimension at all in the national interest, although foreign policy should not be amoral.<sup>57</sup> In earlier works Kennan had spoken of the moral power that the United States can exercise through its example of freedom and democracy, a power so strong that it can even influence hostile powers.<sup>58</sup> Also, writing in 1950 about the Russian/American relationship, Kennan pointed out that there should be no cause for complaints about “a Providence which, by providing the American people with this implacable challenge, has made their entire security as a nation dependent on their pulling themselves together and accepting the responsibilities of *moral* [emphasis added] and political leadership that history plainly intended them to bear.”<sup>59</sup> If America wants to defend its mission to spread its exceptional ideas of freedom, democracy, and capitalism to others; to create an

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<sup>56</sup> Hans Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982), 114.

<sup>57</sup> George F. Kennan, “Morality and Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 64 (winter 1985-86): 206.

<sup>58</sup> George F. Kennan, *The Cloud of Danger* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1975), 25.

<sup>59</sup> George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy 1900-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 128.

international climate where government by consent can thrive, even if it is by example only, then it is difficult to see how this differs from Wilsonian principles.<sup>60</sup>

### *Continental Realism*

Mead points out that the country's foreign policy is not always held in high esteem because it defies the conventional wisdom that many analysts bring to its study. The conventional wisdom assumes that the foreign policy experience of the European states in their prime defines what international life is; and it focuses on the nineteenth century ideas coming from the Continent, especially Prussia, France, and Austria. It ignores the many distinctive features of Britain in that century and America today. Some find certain aspects of the liberal, values-driven policies of Prime Minister William Gladstone as vulgar as United States policies in the contemporary world. Mead argues that this approach to foreign policy is extremely influential in academic circles and is also espoused by the ever chattering pundits. However it clings to a set of assumptions that make it almost impossible to understand what American foreign policy is or why it works. He believes that there are three main areas of difference between American and Continental contexts. The first is the realm of economics. For the Americans and British, economics is at the forefront of their policies; for nineteenth century Europe politics was the number one concern and economics was an afterthought. It was this emphasis on economics that brought first the British and later the Americans to global hegemony.

A second distortion made by Continental realists is that they have been Eurocentric; they see Europe as the main theater of world politics. The British and

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<sup>60</sup> For a realist account of Carter's foreign policy and its philosophical implications for the possibility of a more humane world order, see Robert Alexander Kraig, "The Tragic Science: The Uses of Jimmy Carter in Foreign Policy Realism," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 5 No. 1 (2002): 1-30.

Americans, separated from Europe by the English Channel or by the Atlantic Ocean, disagreed. While the United States tried to stay aloof from Europe, the Continent was too important to ignore. It was not the only fish in the sea, however, and Asia and Latin America received their share of attention, especially in the days before World War I. Both the United States and Britain have woven webs of trade and investment, covering entire continents and island communities. Maintaining the security of that global order has been a major goal.

Lastly, Continental realism has a set of assumptions about the processes of foreign policy that make it difficult to think coherently. They believe that the best foreign policies are the products of a single great master, such as Bismarck, Talleyrand, Metternich, or Kissinger who act as if they were playing a great game of chess. The great master is excused from the normal restraints of morality in the service of his vision. The American political system does not create a smooth path for such people. United States foreign policy is usually a group effort; but, unfortunately in Mead's view, the secretary of state often plays a subordinate role. The pattern of divided authority, short tenure, and internal rivalry in the executive branch is an old one in the US, and this is different from the Continent where men such as Bismarck served for many years. The division of power between the executive and legislative branches of governments creates a slow, uncertain "often ridiculous" process of public debate. Furthermore, people considered eccentric or even dangerous in other nations have a voice in America. In short, the United States does not fit the Continental model of what states should look like.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Mead, *Special Providence*, Ch. 2, "The Kaleidoscope of American Foreign Policy," 30-55; see as well John M. Moore, "The Constitution, Foreign Policy, and Deterrence: The Separation of Powers in a Dangerous World," The Heritage Foundation, Lecture #82, December 14, 1986, available at [www.heritage.org/Research/PoliticalPhilosophy/HL82.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/PoliticalPhilosophy/HL82.cfm), accessed 28 December 2007.

Mead believes that Continental realism peaked under Nixon and Ford.

International life was to be morals free, and they removed the moral element from the Soviet-American equation. They pursued détente based on mutual interests and ignored the differences in philosophy. Joan Hoff describes Nixon as “apricipled,” rather than pragmatic. Given this worldview, the Vietnam War was not a moral crusade nor was it a moral disaster. It was a problem to be approached in a practical way. Economic issues were ignored as threats. For traditional American diplomats, the erosion of the Bretton Woods system would have been seen as a greater threat than Vietnam; and they would have worked to mitigate the consequences of its fall, or to have strengthened it. Nixon’s methods were as Continental as the substance. He believed he should work alone, depending on the advice of Kissinger, and ignoring the pesky legislature. The bureaucracy was ignored as well. Hoff argues that democratic principles were severed from democratic structures. Nixon did have his successes, however; including the opening to China and SALT I, both of which helped to stabilize the US-Soviet relationship. Mead connects the collapse of the Bretton Woods system to a humiliating end of the Vietnam War, causing long-term resentment and bitterness at the failure to end it sooner, and hampering every president since. The economic chaos the collapse engendered inflicted lasting damage on the American economy and on United States relations with Western Europe and Japan. The waves of inflation set off by the currency crash affected private investors and national governments alike. It led to the stagflation of the 1970s as well as the oil shocks. Harry Johnson believed that it would lead to another international monetary crisis before the decade was over. He was, unfortunately, correct.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>See Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Harry G. Johnson, “The

There have been other critics of twentieth century realism. Richard Ned Lebow, for example, argues that realist theory failed miserably to predict the Soviet Union's renunciation of its empire and leading role as a superpower. There is so much disagreement among the various schools of realism that there are competing predictions that makes it difficult to falsify an assertion. Almost any outcome can be made consistent with some variant of the school.<sup>63</sup>

### *Power*

One might define power as A's ability to get B to do something B would otherwise not do; or, as George Catlin postulated, the *homo politicus* is one who "seeks to bring into conformity with his own will the wills of others, so that he may the better attain his own ends."<sup>64</sup> Thomas Hobbes defines power as man's "means to obtain some future apparent good."<sup>65</sup> Joseph Nye defines power as the ability "to effect the outcomes you want, and if necessary, to change the behavior of others to make this happen." The ability to obtain these outcomes demands the possession of various resources, so power can also be defined "as possession of relatively large amounts of such elements as population, territory, natural resources, economic strength, military force and political stability."

Until recently, the foundations of power in the second half of the twentieth century have moved away from an emphasis on the military. For one thing, nuclear

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International Monetary Crisis of 1971," reviewed in *Journal of Business* 46, (Jan. 1973), 11-23; Mead, *Special Providence*, 72-75; for a further discussion of two versions of internationalism, see Michael Mandelbaum and William Schneider, "The New Internationalisms," *International Security* 2 (winter 1978), 81-98.

<sup>63</sup>Richard Ned Lebow, "The Long Peace, the End of the Cold War, and the Failure of Realism," *International Organization* 48 (spring 1994): 249-277.

<sup>64</sup>George Edward Gordon Catlin, *The Science and Method of Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1927), 309.

<sup>65</sup>*Leviathan* quoted in James H. Read, "Thomas Hobbes: Power in the State of Nature, Power in Civil Society," *Polity* 23 (summer 1991): 505.

power is so destructive that it is too costly to use. A second reason is that the rise of nationalism has made it difficult for empires to rule over awakened populations. In addition, societies have changed, especially since World War Two and the end of the Cold War. The use of force is acceptable to the post-industrial countries only if there is a moral justification to ensure popular support; that is, if the threat is existential.<sup>66</sup> This is not to say that the United States and other similar nations will not use military power; in fact, once Americans are aroused, they have, historically, been quite willing to use it. For example, when America entered World War Two, the military leadership was committed to the bombing of military and industrial targets in Germany that were tied to the Nazi war machine. "Precision" technology was in its infancy at the time, so there were widespread civilian casualties, but the casualty rates were relatively small compared to those of the Dresden and Berlin raids of 1945. The willingness to engage in terror bombing beginning in early 1945 demonstrated a shift in thinking. One reason for this was the increasing security incentives for the United States to do so. The slowdown of the Allied advance in the winter of 1944-45 raised the possibility that there would be a long and bloody ground campaign that would cost thousands of American lives.<sup>67</sup> Drastic times called for drastic measures. At the time of the bombings, the Dresden raids constituted the largest killing of civilians by military forces in one place at one time since the campaigns of Genghis Khan.<sup>68</sup>

A final restraint on the use of force is that it can easily jeopardize economic objectives. In a globalized society, dictators of lesser developed countries depend on

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<sup>66</sup> Nye, Jr., *The Paradox of American Power*, 4.-5; Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "The Velvet Hegemon," *Foreign Policy* 136 (May-June, 2003): 74-75.

<sup>67</sup> McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy*, 165-166.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflict*, 2: 901. cited in Mead, *Special Providence*, 219.



foreign investment. Formerly, it was “cheaper to seize another state’s territory by force than to develop the sophisticated economic and trading apparatus needed to derive benefit from commercial exchange with it.”<sup>69</sup> Nonetheless, the *threat* of military force is routinely used to deter threats and to ensure access to certain crucial resources, such as oil in the Persian Gulf.

Nye differentiates between “soft” and “hard” power. Hard power can be both military and economic and both of these facets of power can be used as either carrots or sticks to get others to do what a nation wants. However, there is an indirect way to achieve a nation’s objectives. Others may want to follow a country because they admire its values and want to be like it, attaining a similar level of prosperity and openness. This soft power “rests on the ability to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences of others.”<sup>70</sup> Soft power arises out of values and is expressed in culture. These are intangible and hard to measure, but are nonetheless important. The United States can either attract or repel other nations by the example it sets.

In 2007, Nye and others talk about “smart power.” Smart power is defined as a combination of soft and hard power, used in ways that can bring about American objectives. They contend that the country needs to revive its ability to inspire and persuade others to follow it, rather than to depend on military might. America’s standing in the world has dwindled in the recent past, with diplomacy and public engagement of others sorely neglected.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State*, 16, 160.

<sup>70</sup> Nye, *The Paradox of American Power*, 9; Kenneth Thompson, “Power, Force and Diplomacy,” *The Review of Politics* 43 (July 1981): 411.

<sup>71</sup> Richard Armitage and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Co-chairs, Commission on Smart Power, “A Smarter, More Secure America. (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007), hereafter identified as CSIS).

It is not always easy to integrate values and other interests, and the methods for doing so have cut across party lines. Some say the United States should simply stay at home. Isolationists cite John Quincy Adams who asserted that America “goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy,” and realists focus on his advice that we should not involve ourselves abroad “beyond the power of extrication in all the wars of interest and intrigue.”<sup>72</sup> The use of force to settle disputes is probably the most controversial aspect of power. In the West from the Middle Ages onward, the most effective restraint on the warlike tendencies of individuals has been the presence of an external threat; and the periods least affected by state on state violence have been those which existed within an international community that had an accepted body of law and custom to guide it. The Congress of Vienna set up such a system after a period of twenty-three years of almost uninterrupted warfare brought about by the French Revolution and the ambitions of Napoleon Bonaparte. Those statesmen secured peace for two generations, and the system, as modified by Bismarck, secured it for the rest of the century. When the system broke down, and the historical power politics returned in the years before 1914, the results were catastrophic. When the war was over, Wilson tried to establish a new system of collective security, and since that time liberals have stressed the importance of the human element in international affairs. It is ironic that the realists blamed the liberals for the problems of the twentieth century when, in retrospect, it was the European penchant for power politics as usual that emboldened a new Germany to twice bid for hegemony. Humanity took one of its worst beatings in the process.

*Power and Principle in Foreign Policy*

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<sup>72</sup>Richard Bernstein, “To Butt In or Not in Human Rights: The Gap Narrows,” *New York Times*, 4 August 2001.

There are inherent contradictions and tensions within the global system that Carter worked in. While the allies were content to allow the Americans to guarantee their security as they went peacefully about business, the American-driven system of globalization generated resentment, and thus instability, in certain regions. The disregard of Nixon in dismantling the Bretton Woods monetary system caused inflation and hardship for many throughout the decade of the seventies and had lasting consequences on the United States economy. European allies as well as Japan were hurt, as were third world countries, where social conflicts bubbled to the surface and governments were undermined. The US' overwhelming support of Israel in the Yom Kippur War further destabilized the world because of an oil embargo. Carter came to power at a time of flux, inheriting economic confusion along with suspicious allies, which led to difficulties in persuading them to agree to such things as sanctions against Iran during the hostage crisis. It was also difficult to do this because of the economic stakes involved. No country wanted another oil embargo. The economy was volatile; the American public was weary of the Vietnam War, disgusted by Watergate, and unhappy with detente. He tried a different approach, de-emphasizing the East-West equation, and shifting America's attention to regions such as Southern Africa. Carter seemed to have a good grasp of when to intervene, or not, in the affairs of others. The Angolan civil war is a good example. Although urged by numerous factions to intervene with American troops, Carter chose a more prudent course, remembering one of the principles of just war: a high probability of good consequences.<sup>73</sup> He also changed the approach to the Middle East

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<sup>73</sup> McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy*, 36-37, 91, 149; Nye, *The Paradox of American Power*, 151-152; see also Nardin and Mapel, *Traditions of International Ethics*.

and doggedly pursued peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors. The result was a stunning accomplishment: a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.

The international system Carter operated in was fraught with danger because of the rivalry between the USSR and the United States, which was overlaid by the threat of nuclear annihilation. The Cold War played itself out in a series of proxy wars – indirect confrontations in third world countries and the Middle East. There was always the danger, however, that direct conflict was possible. A highly dangerous situation developed during the Iranian Revolution when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. Carter was vigilant, but there was no hasty military intervention to protect American interests. Instead the administration imposed sanctions on the SU, worked cooperatively with Pakistan, and supplied the Afghans with arms, sometimes purchased from a corrupt Soviet army. It also increased its presence in the Gulf region and warned the Soviets off. The Soviets put up a good fight, but stumbled out exhausted after ten years. It soon collapsed. Patience and negotiation is fundamental to all diplomatic procedures, from deterrence and coercive diplomacy, to crisis management and war termination, and Carter demonstrated extraordinary patience and resolve, one might say *prudence*, in trying to settle international crises peacefully.<sup>74</sup>

Carter faced difficult issues and few good policy options were available to him on many of these, such as the Iranian Revolution and the subsequent hostage crisis. For months he struggled to keep America out of a war with Iran, going against popular opinion and no doubt damaging his reelection chances. Critics claimed that the failure to use force was to blame for the “decline of American influence over events affecting the

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<sup>74</sup> See Gordon A. Craig and Alexander L. George, *Force and Statecraft*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), xiii.

captives.” Every attempt to bring the weight of the international community to bear on the government of Iran, or to use economic sanctions, was (supposedly) doomed to failure. The moral degradation of the regime was so great that the leaders were beyond the reach of a reasonable response to moral and political authority. These same voices, by the fall of 1981, began to call for sanctions against Iraq for aggression against Iran. Carter, however, was too smart to lead the country into a needless war. He did threaten the use of force if any of the hostages were killed or put on trial, which the Iranians evidently understood to be a credible threat since neither of these things happened. Carter’s focus on the Greater Middle East as a looming problem, his vision in creating the Rapid Deployment Force (the forerunner of CENTCOM), his policies to get better interoperability of the military, his success in persuading Congress to allocate more money for the military, were all to his credit. The role of the military was not robust enough by 1979 to satisfy either it or the general public, and the Iranian hostage crisis provoked a desire for a military that was center stage. Reagan is commonly viewed as providing that. A closer look points to Carter as the initiator. Popular films that reflected this attitude included *Rambo*, *Top Gun*, and *The Hunt for Red October*.<sup>75</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Two enduring elements of a good foreign policy are patience and diplomacy, or one might say *prudence*, which were Carter’s most effective tools in crafting policies. Americans believe that the ideals and institutions that have brought peace and prosperity to them can do the same for others worldwide. All social groups contend for influence and power, but on the international scene rivalries are less well controlled by law and government. The task of diplomacy is to limit the struggles through legal rules or moral

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<sup>75</sup> Campbell and O’Hanlon, *Hard Power*, 22.

maxims and establish balances of power of rough equilibrium among rival states. According to Harold Nicolson, a scholar of diplomacy, it is either heroic or commercial. Heroic diplomacy, often associated with the military, always tries to maintain a preponderance of power as a prerequisite of diplomacy. Commercial diplomacy, on the other hand, understands that for every advantage there must be a disadvantage, so diplomacy must entail a give and take among the parties. Power is many sided; it is not simply military power. Estimating power other than military power is difficult, and the intangibles must be included. Foreign policy estimates require the best-informed judgment of capabilities *and* intentions, and successful foreign policies consider both.

Diplomacy can be a channel of power, as Carter demonstrated. Another definition of power offered by Kenneth Thompson is that it is a relationship; and diplomacy remains the “most consistently used channel through which statesmen work their will on one another and protect their interests.” Lyndon Johnson contemplated bombing North Korea after the seizure of the *USS Pueblo* but changed his mind and turned to diplomacy. After eleven months the crew was released. Carter used diplomacy in his hostage situation as well, and all of them came home alive. In both cases, the threat of force was always present, but in the end it was unnecessary.<sup>76</sup> While many will argue that Carter’s administration was generally a failure, this work argues that a number of Carter’s policies, was successful, especially from the perspective of 2008 and what we now know. Iran was his downfall. While there are legitimate criticisms of how he handled the revolution and the hostage crisis both, this work tries to demonstrate that his policies, as well as Iran’s, led to a dramatic weakening of that country. It lost at least \$10 billion of its assets frozen in the US, its economy was severely weakened by economic

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<sup>76</sup> Thompson, “Power, Force and Diplomacy,” 426-432.

sanctions as well as by its own hand, and its army disintegrated, leading Iraq to attack it. The Panama Canal operates efficiently and profitably; there has been no general war in the Middle East since the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty; and, while problems remain in Southern Africa, many live under majority rule.

Since political realism, and according to Mead, Continental realism, has dominated the landscape of international relations for much of the last half of the twentieth century, a study of the Carter presidency within a framework of both power *and* principles, from the perspective of what we know now, should contribute to a greater understanding of how the pursuit of both can be used to craft successful, long term policies that are truly in the national interest. Success is not always immediately evident; and prudence is always in for the long haul, not for quick, short, and often shortsighted, victories. There are numerous instances in the second half of the twentieth century when prudence proved to be the better path towards the national interest. Two examples come to mind – Truman’s response to the Berlin Blockade and Eisenhower’s Camp David response to Khrushchev’s attempts to brew trouble in Berlin in 1959. It is not only *what* a nation or a leader does, but *how* that is important. This work argues that Carter brought the nation back to the prudence of Truman and Eisenhower, after a prolonged absence because of the Vietnam War and Watergate. He could be either flexible or steadfast, depending on what he perceived to be in the national interest. The current literature on Carter does not present him in this light. That which is critical claims either that he had no coherent world view, and was therefore inconsistent (not flexible); others say that he had a world view, but that it was naïve and ineffective; and his preoccupation with change in the world led him to ignore the traditional relevance of power in favor of

principle. The literature which praises him claims that his policies represented a commitment to transnational capital, and emphasize his ties to the Trilateral Commission. Carter generally had an optimistic view of the United States' ability to achieve its interests, in spite of the fact that the world was no longer bi-polar and power and leadership were devolving outward. He believed that the loss of relative power could be mitigated by a strategy of diplomacy that emphasized the shared interests and values of the United States and its friends and allies. Areas of interdependence could be exploited for the good of the international system, and because of this interdependence, long-term advantages needed to be considered more than previously when considering short term objectives.

In spite of his achievements, Carter lost the 1980 election. Many academics and pundits were happy to see him go. *The Carter Implosion* by Donald Spencer is a strong attack on his foreign policy because of his "amateur style" of diplomacy. Spencer claims Carter could not achieve his objectives because he did not understand the context or the pursuit of diplomacy. Astonishingly, Spencer claims that Carter was responsible for the Iranian Revolution, the hostage crisis, the collapse of détente with the Soviets, and other events across the globe. The Camp David Accords and the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty are not mentioned. Phil Williams, on the other hand, claims that while Carter's policies ultimately failed, it was not due to a misplaced idealism; but because he tried to change the international agenda from confrontation with the Soviet Union by demoting its importance. There were powerful domestic challengers to this notion, especially from the Committee on the Present Danger, which totally disagreed on Carter's East-West stance



as well as détente. Since the American public was accustomed to think in terms of containment of the Soviets, Carter's attempt to minimize it hurt his political fortunes.<sup>77</sup>

Gabriel Kolko is critical in general of the United States policies and the Third World. His work, *Confronting the Third World*, makes no distinction in Carter's interests and achievements in human rights, but instead claims that all administrations from 1945 onward were interested only in business opportunities for Americans. This, in turn, required stability. It was inevitable that all would fail.<sup>78</sup> Carter was also dubbed a failure in the Arab world which saw the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty as a sellout of the Palestinians. They ended up believing that the United States would support Israel no matter what and that Carter was no different from his predecessors. No attention is paid to the fact that the Camp David Accords actually lost Carter Jewish votes in 1980.<sup>79</sup>

Much of the negative literature centers on East-West issues, which this work did not directly address. Not all was negative, however. Stanley Hoffman points out in "Requiem" that Carter's reassertion of human rights was welcomed by most in 1977 and was a very great success by most accounts. He goes on to say that by the time of the 1980 election there had been too many disappointments for people to remember that success. His greatest failure was in East-West relations.<sup>80</sup> Tom J. Farer in "Searching for Defeat" gives Carter credit for changing the emphasis away from Cold War issues. He claims that Carter had no real idea of how difficult it would be to change direction

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<sup>77</sup> See Donald S. Spencer, *The Carter Implosion*; Phil Williams, "The Limits of American Power: From Nixon to Reagan," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 63 (autumn 1987): 575-587.

<sup>78</sup> Gabriel Kolko, *Confronting the Third World: United States Foreign Policy 1945-1980*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.)

<sup>79</sup> Arab Reports and Analysis, "Carter from A Saudi Perspective," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 10 (winter 1981): 125-127.

<sup>80</sup> Hoffmann, "Requiem."

because there were so many vested interests, both at home and abroad, in the old policies of containment.<sup>81</sup>

This work will examine Carter's policies concerning arms transfers, the Panama Canal Treaties, Southern Africa, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. Much of the literature implies either that moral principles *or* power politics must govern. When citing Hobbes, realists seldom mention anything but his emphasis on power, leaving out the moral dimension he included in his analysis. While some realists, such as Carr, insist that a moral dimension is also an essential part of international politics, many realists have pushed morality and ethics to the periphery. This reached its apex under Nixon and Kissinger. Carter moved away from this approach to foreign policy, and this work demonstrates that he contributed significantly to the end of the Cold War. His ideological opposition to communism based on their human rights violations, and a principled opposition to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, became an organizing principle of his administration. He contributed significantly to the end of the Cold War in that the United States armed the opposition to the communist based and Soviet supported government in that country. The Soviets then invaded Afghanistan, to their peril, stayed for approximately ten years, stumbled out and collapsed.

It is not that Carter wanted to overthrow the Soviet regime; rather, he wanted to demonstrate the depth of American sympathy for those people who suffered from its excesses. The Soviets eventually were led into a dialogue on human rights that ended up undermining its legitimacy which also contributed to the end of the Cold War.<sup>82</sup> In the meantime, the human rights issue did in fact hurt the US-Soviet relationship.

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<sup>81</sup> Farer, "Searching for Defeat," *Foreign Policy* 40 (autumn 1980): 155-174.

<sup>82</sup> See Philip H. Gordon, "Can the War On Terror Be Won? How to Fight the Right War," *Foreign Affairs* 86 (November/December 2007): 53-66.

Nonetheless, Reagan was able to make use of this to strengthen the resolve of the American people and its allies to play out the final act of the Cold War. It was Carter's morality in foreign policy that allowed Reagan to call the Soviet Union the "evil empire." He built on the base that Carter laid, but returned to a more unilateral version of American exceptionalism and tied idealism to the military. Reagan also built on Carter's base for more funding for the military and better interoperability among the forces. The lack of interoperability showed up again in the Grenada invasion. The political right's voice on Panama quieted down after the 1980 election, and was seldom heard from until the latter part of 1999, as the Canal was readied to come under Panamanian sovereignty and the United States was readying for another presidential election. Although Reagan did not follow up on Carter's initiatives in southern Africa, those initiatives were not in vain; even South Africa had a democratic election in 1994 – its first.

Power in the West was devolving outwards, towards Europe and Japan in the years leading up to Carter's administration; and while America was still their guarantor, it no longer had total hegemony. These were independent power centers; another reason why American leverage was sometimes not as effective as it had been in previous times. Carter always tried to work with America's allies, attempting to bring them along with United States policies. It was a slow process. From the vantage point of 2007, this process promises much more success than unilateral action, in spite of (or perhaps because of) a world that is trying to find its way after the end of the Cold War.<sup>83</sup> A new international system is still forming, with states jockeying to find their positions in it.

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<sup>83</sup>See Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); In *The Paradox of American Power*, Nye warns against unilateralism, arrogance, and parochialism prior to 9/11 because it would undercut the effectiveness of United States power, especially the attractiveness and influence of its soft power and global leadership.

The collapse of the Soviet Union left the United States with an enormous amount of power, but it was not absolute. As Bruce Cummings asserts, because the Cold War ended essentially by the unilateral actions of the Soviet Union, the United States was free to continue the containment of allies and the pursuit of a global mission. It was as if “two horses were running around the track, one broke its leg and the other kept on running.”<sup>84</sup>

The terror attack on the United States on 9/11 altered the political landscape further. Zbigniew Brzezinski argues for global leadership based on human rights, the pursuit of multilateral agreements and alliances, and interdependence, much the same as during the Carter years. The new reality in 2007 is that America is the only nation capable of providing global stability through military policing, while at the same time instigating global instability through globalization.<sup>85</sup> The nation is in a historic position. It can either move the planet forward through global leadership by shifting from hegemony to stable international institutions and by defining and mobilizing the world in the next phase of globalization; or it can inundate it through erroneous projections of military might which could lead to a perpetual Orwellian insecurity.

Some scholars argue that Carter had no coherent overview and never saw the connections among the various issues. Others argue that he wanted to promote a global community based on a more idealistic and moral view of the international environment. A dominant concern was with global change, and he sought to play a constructive role in the developments that were taking place. He was the first to embrace the view of a more interdependent world and tried to shed the myopic, overemphasis on an East-West view.

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<sup>84</sup> Bruce Cummings in Michael J. Hogan, ed., *The End of the Cold War: Its Meaning and Implications* (Cambridge: University Press, 1992), 89.

<sup>85</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), ix.

He began his tenure with a great deal of optimism, but later began to become more pessimistic when the Soviets became more adventurous, especially in Africa and Afghanistan. The administration went through a period of transition, and Carter's policy of containment became more evident in 1979 with the Iranian hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, as well as (and perhaps especially because of) the domestic challenges posed to his administration from the political right. To some, this change meant that he had no overall vision, to others it reflects his flexibility, his ability to react realistically to events on the ground. No one died by the sword during his tenure, something that he was very proud of, as was Dwight Eisenhower after the conclusion of the Korean War. In any case, Carter never abandoned his principles and he paid more attention to Third World issues than most presidents before him, and this was to his credit.

## CHAPTER III

### CARTER AND THE PANAMA CANAL TREATIES

#### INTRODUCTION

One of the most difficult battles that Carter faced in his presidency was the effort to transfer sovereignty of the Canal Zone to Panama. Although ultimately successful, it cost the supporters dearly. Of the twenty senators up for reelection who voted in favor of ratifying the first Treaty in 1978, seven were defeated; six chose not to run. The issue continued to be highly charged, and in the election of 1980 eleven more of the senators who had supported the Treaties were defeated, along with the president.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will examine the dilemmas that Carter faced, within the context of power and principle, and discuss why this issue was so contentious, for both Panama and the US. Part of the answer can be found in the history of the original treaties, signed in 1903, and the chapter will therefore address the subject within its historical context, as well as the broader context of the United States' relations with Latin America. Human rights in the region was a concern to a number of key players and will be considered, as well as strategic worries about the security of the Canal. Strategic matters were often cited as a reason for the United States to maintain control; since its return might send a message to the Soviet Union that the western hemisphere might now be open to further penetration by non-Western nations. This unease had been magnified by the Cuban missile crisis, and the United States had followed a policy of supporting "anti-communist" right wing governments in the region, both politically and militarily, especially by funneling arms to

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<sup>1</sup> Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 188.

these governments. The regional context is important because the United States thought in those terms, making little distinction between countries.

### *The Regional Context*

The United States considered the small strip of land known as Central America, composed of five republics, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras, as its backyard from the time of the Monroe Doctrine, issued in 1823. They were assumed to be natural allies. As the country grew stronger, no leader came to power there without its consent. Later, the countries became victims of the Cold War, and repressive, brutal right wing dictators were favored over any reform minded left wing leader. The geographic proximity to the isthmus and the location between two oceans made these republics strategically important to the US.<sup>2</sup>

The post World War II era slowly brought a change from Franklin D. Roosevelt's (FDR) "Good Neighbor Policy" of the 1930s and early 1940s. During the war America encouraged the people of Latin America to work with communist groups, and even encouraged Soviet commercial and political officials to travel in the region in order to build relationships. However, by 1946 the historical fear of communism revived as the Soviets occupied Eastern Europe, and communist parties competed for power in the Middle East and Asia as well as Western Europe. This fear of communism, plus the changed configuration of power in the world, distracted the country from Latin America, as it focused primarily on Europe and Asia. Although Harry Truman, then president of the US, maintained the Good Neighbor Policy in its broad outlines, he also experimented

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<sup>2</sup> Clara Nieto, *Masters of War*, 105; see also Robert A. Pastor, "Explaining U.S. Policy Toward the Caribbean Basin: Fixed and Emerging Images" (Review Article), *World Politics* 38 (April 1986): 483-515 which discusses the changing perceptions of the region.

with a new policy to promote democracy and distance the nation from the dictators.<sup>3</sup> In 1947, George Kennan, an American diplomat in Moscow, sent his famous cable to Washington, arguing that the Soviets had to be *contained*. This became the cornerstone of American foreign policy, in one manner or another, for the next forty years. It did not become the dominant theme in United States-Latin American relations immediately; but was, rather, a gradual thing. In the meantime, the program of Latin America itself changed: it wanted subsidized loans for development. At the Bogota Conference in 1948, which created the Organization of American States (OAS), the foreign ministers of the region asked Secretary of State George Marshall for a “Marshall Plan for Latin America.” He explained that Europe’s needs were more critical. Later, however, Truman created his Point 4 Technical Assistance Program which funneled aid to Latin America and other lesser developed countries (LDCs), although it was never on the scale of the Marshall Plan aid.<sup>4</sup>

As the country neglected its neighbors to the south, regional experts and American diplomats within Latin America became the primary functionaries of United States policy, leading to a lack of coherence and consistency. As the Cold War escalated, a struggle broke out in the country between those who favored the promotion of democratic institutions and those who believed that inter-continental unity and a pledge of nonintervention better served the nation’s security interests. For example, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Spruille Braden successfully blocked additional arms sales to the region in 1946, because he believed it would seriously retard

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<sup>3</sup> See Steven Schwartzberg, *Democracy and U.S. Policy in Latin America During the Truman Years* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Kyle Longley, *In the Eagle’s Shadow*, (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2002), 196, 97; Robert A. Pastor, “The U.S. and the Caribbean: The Power of the Whirlpool,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 533 “Trends in US-Caribbean Relations” (1994): 19-32.



social progress. Braden also began to pressure President Anastasia Somoza Debayle, the Nicaraguan dictator, to hold free elections, although the United States had supported him throughout the Depression and World War II as an ally. When Somoza capitulated to the pressure, his hand-picked successor won the election, but soon began to replace Somoza's longtime cronies in the government. Conflict followed and within a few weeks Somoza overthrew the new government and put his uncle in power. Subsequently, the State Department withdrew aid from Nicaragua. For more than a year Washington withheld recognition of the government, but Somoza counterattacked, claiming that his enemies harbored communist sympathies. Ultimately he succeeded in convincing the United States that he was a safeguard against the leftists, and in May 1948 the country reestablished full relations. Some argue that this was the moment when security needs triumphed over the promotion of democracy.<sup>5</sup> Others believe that the turning point actually came in 1954 under the Eisenhower administration, with his plan to overthrow the regime of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala because it had communists within its government. The CIA-engineered coup ended the ten year "spring" presided over by Arbenz and Juan Jose Arevalo; a spring that produced the first true agrarian reform in Central America. A half million people received land they very desperately needed. Many believe that the CIA overthrew Arbenz because the land that he had expropriated belonged to the United Fruit Company.<sup>6</sup> The catalyst for this plan was the discovery of a shipload of arms sailing to Guatemala from Eastern Europe. Although the plan failed to accomplish this goal, it galvanized the Guatemalan military to stage a coup.<sup>7</sup> Guatemalan

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<sup>5</sup> Longley, *In the Eagle's Shadow*, 199.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Pastor, *The U.S. and the Caribbean: The Power of the Whirlpool*, 25.

democracy and reform died, strangled in its crib. The message was that the United States would not tolerate leftists, even if they came to power in legitimate democratic elections, and that it would work with right-wing dictators like Carlos Castillo Armas in Guatemala and Somoza in Nicaragua. This had the unfortunate consequence of squeezing out the more democratic elements from the political process, encouraging leftists to revolt and rightists to suppress dissent.<sup>8</sup> Also, if a group felt its access to power was blocked it almost always turned to the outside for support. This meant either the United States, if it was not already supporting the government, or the Soviet Union.<sup>9</sup> Some believe that the United States was an “aggressive, expansionist imperial power...” and cited news stories that described the embargo against Cuba designed to strangle its economy, that told of giving a billion dollars to Colombia to suppress a guerrilla movement, and relayed the identification of a high Peruvian official, Vladimoros Montesinos who had been implicated in corruption, torture, and death squads, as working for the CIA.<sup>10</sup>

Relations between Latin America and the United States began to change considerably beginning in the 1960s, mainly because those countries became more industrialized, with their economies better integrated into the world economy, leaving them less closely tied to the US. By the time of the debates on the Panama Canal Treaties, the days of the “banana republics” meekly following the lead of their neighbor to the north were gone.<sup>11</sup> The region as a whole has a history of political instability, mainly because of the lack of economic and political reform, and by 1977 the country could no longer ignore the simmering resentment in Panama over obsolete treaties. Carter

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>10</sup> Clara Nieto, *Masters of War*, ii.

<sup>11</sup> Abraham F. Lowenthal “Rethinking U.S. Interests in the Western Hemisphere,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 29 (Spring 1987): 1-23.

made the unpopular decision of revising them and modernizing relations with Panama. He hoped that an agreement could be reached on principles that the Panamanians as well as the North Americans considered fair and just, thus sending a signal to other Latin American countries that United States policy was headed in a new direction.

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The question of who should control the Isthmus reaches backward in Western history to the arrival of the Spanish 400 years ago. When Spanish rule ended in 1821, the United States and Great Britain began to jostle for position in the region, and as technology developed, the question became who should control a canal, not who should simply dominate the area. As the United States expanded westward, and especially after it gained control of California from Mexico, the question became more urgent. The Spanish-American War of 1898 made a canal an imperative, as the Americans began to spread across the globe and build an empire. The key to maintaining an empire, according to the influential American Navy Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, lay in controlling the Caribbean and having a navy strong enough to secure United States interests in both the Caribbean and the Pacific.<sup>12</sup> President Theodore Roosevelt agreed with this position. With the diplomatic agreement of the British, the United States, armed with new technology, new medical knowledge, and renewed determination, began the process of building a canal.

As Congress debated the several issues surrounding the venture, President Theodore Roosevelt's impatience became apparent. He later boasted that he "took the

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<sup>12</sup> Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1890).

Canal and let Congress debate.”<sup>13</sup> It was that very sense of urgency by Roosevelt that almost immediately produced the germ of the counterforce that Carter would deal with in the 1970s. In the meantime, there was plenty of debate. For one thing, the country was considering Nicaragua as a possible route; for another, the rights to build a canal in Panama had been purchased from Colombia by the French. In 1878, Ferdinand deLesseps, builder of the Suez Canal, announced that he would build a sea level canal in Panama. In a display of power, the United States sent warships in protest, but Colombia paid no attention and the French began to dig. A sea level canal, rather than one with a multi-tiered lock system, proved to be one of the fatal mistakes the French company made. Another was that there was no all out war waged against malaria and yellow fever. DeLesseps failed in his attempt, his son went to prison for fraud and bribery, and the French Third Republic faced a serious challenge, one of several that almost caused its collapse. In the meantime, the United States more and more favored a route across Nicaragua, because it appeared to be easier and because the remains of the deLesseps venture had been bought out by the New Panama Company, also French, and they were asking \$109 million for its assets and rights in Panama. Two remarkable men intervened and turned the tide against the Nicaraguan route: William Nelson Cromwell, head of a prestigious law firm in New York, Sullivan and Cromwell, and Philippe Bunau-Varilla of the New Panama Company. Cromwell became the New Panama Company’s agent in the US, and through campaign contributions to leading Republicans, facilitated by Marcus Hanna a confidant of President William McKinley, prevented a plank from being included in the Republican party platform favoring the Nicaraguan canal. Cromwell then

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Henry F. Pringle, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Biography*, (New York: Harcourt, Bruce, 1956), 233 and cited in George D. Moffett III *The Limits of Victor*, 21.

convinced Bunau-Varilla to lower his price to \$40 million. Between 1896 and 1902, Cromwell fended off the commitment to Nicaragua entirely. Congress, after sending a committee to Paris to assess the situation, passed legislation that authorized the canal to be built in Panama.<sup>14</sup>

Roosevelt was happy to oblige. The only obstacle left was Colombia, which had a tenuous claim on Panama at best. Panamanian nationalism had been born early in its 400 year history and this is an important point to any understanding of the events of the 1960s and 1970s – the most important point, according to Walter LaFeber. Secretary of State John Hay convinced the Colombian ambassador in Washington to sign a treaty giving the United States a 99-year lease on a strip of land six miles wide which would be the Canal Zone. It would pay Colombia \$10 million plus an annual payment of \$250,000 in perpetuity. The United States Senate ratified the treaty but the Colombian parliament rejected it unanimously. They wanted more money and knew that the French rights to build would expire soon. Roosevelt was furious, and for several months he treated anyone who would listen to a sampling of his rich vocabulary, calling the Colombians everything from “inefficient bandits” to “a corrupt pithecoïd [sic] community.” He ranted to his friend W.R. Thayer, “You could no more make an agreement with the Colombian rulers than you could nail currant jelly to a wall....”<sup>15</sup> His mind began to turn to the idea of “self determination” for Panama, foreshadowing the Wilsonian idealist stance of almost two decades later. Bunau-Varilla and Panamanian nationalists began to develop a solution to the problem. With help from the State Department, Bunau-Varilla concocted a scheme for a revolution in Panama. After some confusion, and with some help from the

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<sup>14</sup> Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal*, 15-22 passim.

<sup>15</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, letter to W.R. Thayer, July 2, 1915.

USS *Nashville*, a bit of bribery by Cromwell to buy off the Colombian army, and fast thinking by the commander of the railway, who moved the cars to the Pacific side of the Isthmus thus depriving the remaining loyal Colombians of their use, the revolution succeeded. None of the belligerents was killed. The only casualties were a Chinese citizen, a dog, and according to some reports, a donkey.<sup>16</sup>

Hay cheerfully prepared a treaty which was fundamentally the same agreement that Colombia had rejected. However, in a remarkable move, Bunau-Varilla re-wrote it, hoping to make it more palatable to the Senate so that it would be ratified before the Panamanian envoys arrived in Washington. They were conveniently delayed by Cromwell in New York. As written by Bunau-Varilla, the treaty gave the United States a virtual protectorate over the new country and extensive powers in the Canal Zone. It would have

“all the rights, power, and authority within the zone...which the United States would possess and exercise as if it were the sovereign of the territory within which said lands and waters are located to the entire exclusion of the exercise by the Republic of Panama of any such sovereign rights, power and authority.”<sup>17</sup>

That was the most radical change, one that caused continuous problems in US-Panamanian relations for the next three-quarters of a century.<sup>18</sup> That was not all. Bunau-Varilla widened the Zone from six to ten miles, surrendered Panamanian judicial power in the Zone, and lengthened the lease from 99 years to perpetuity. Hay and Bunau-Varilla signed the treaty at 6:40 p.m., and three hours later the Panamanian envoys arrived in Washington. The Panamanian government vehemently protested “the manifest

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<sup>16</sup> LaFeber, *The Panama Canal*, 23, 32-33; Russell Evans, *The Panama Canal Treaties Swindle* (Signal Books: Carrboro, NC, 1986), 8; Murray N. Rothbard, “The Treaty that Wall Street Wrote,” *Inquiry* 20 (December 1977): 9-14.

<sup>17</sup> Hay-Bunau Varilla Treaty in *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Moffett, *The Limits of Victory*, 21; Rothbard, “The Treaty that Wall Street Wrote,” 9-14.

renunciation of sovereignty” in the treaty, a phrase that echoed through the years. It, however, had little choice but to sign. If it did not, the powerful colossus to the north could abandon Panama and leave the revolutionaries to the mercies of the Colombian army, or the Americans could simply seize the canal area without payment or protection.<sup>19</sup> Some critics of the later Panama Canal Treaties assert that there was never any doubt of American sovereignty over the Canal; that Panama was happy with the provisions of the treaty, and signed happily, “reveling in the warm glow of freedom and self-determination.”<sup>20</sup>

Bunau-Varilla’s personal financial stake in the outcome precluded the possibility of equitable terms for Panama. He had put his personal stamp on all of the events leading to ratification of the 1903 treaty. Roosevelt later argued that the seizure of the Canal was for “the good of civilization,” draping the nation’s actions in the mantle of morality, but the Frenchman had made the treaty so attractive that the United States chose power over principle.<sup>21</sup>

Vocal objections to the 1903 treaty began almost at once. The practical result of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty meant that Panama had to tolerate foreign control over 550 square miles of its best real estate, its best deep water ports, and the potentially profitable commercial opportunities in the Zone. Injured pride and humiliation might have been the most damaging obsession, giving birth to growing agitation and anti-Americanism among

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<sup>19</sup> LaFeber, *The Panama Canal*, 38; George D. Moffett III, *The Limits of Victory*, 22; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 156.

<sup>20</sup> Evans, *The Panama Canal Treaties Swindle*, 7; Rothbard, “The Treaty that Wall Street Wrote,” 9-14.

<sup>21</sup> LaFeber, *The Panama Canal*, 34, 41.

the population. Although some minor modifications were made, real change was difficult, if not impossible, to effect.<sup>22</sup>

### *The Winds of Change*

A new wave of nationalism swept through Asia, Africa, and Latin America after the end of World War II. In Latin America this nationalism was aided by numerous economic and social discontents, who felt that capitalism was tantamount to a license to steal, rather than a path to prosperity open to all. In Panama the middle class supported the reformist policies of Arnolfo Arias, “El Hombre” to his followers, and three time president of Panama. He successfully welded nationalism and reform into an attractive program. This political landscape in Panama, reflected in the rise of middle class nationalism, made it possible by the 1950s to demand a termination of the 1903 treaty. In 1955 some technical changes were made, but frustrations in Panama grew, erupting into violent anti-American demonstrations and new demands to end the treaty altogether. After the 1950s no Panamanian government ever again settled for less than some tangible recognition of Panamanian sovereignty over the Canal Zone.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, others argue that the give-away of the Canal began in the 1930s, and the changes in 1955 surrendered more rights and property, including \$24 million worth of freight yards and passenger stations of the Panama Railroad.<sup>24</sup>

By the early sixties tensions over displaying national flags, symbols of sovereignty, led to a ban on flying either the Panamanian or American flag. When this was violated in January 1964 by some American students, rioting broke out and was met

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<sup>22</sup>Moffett, *The Limits of Victory*, 22-25.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 26, 27.

<sup>24</sup>Evans, *The Panama Treaties Swindle*, 9; Daniel J. Flood, “The Juridical Base of the U.S. Isthmian Canal Policy,” *American Mercury* (January 1964): 22-23.



with force by the US. Four Americans and twenty Panamanians died and dozens more were injured; Panama responded by breaking diplomatic relations with the United States. The military was gravely concerned about the security of the Canal as well as the loss of life. President Lyndon Johnson (LBJ) called the president of Panama, Roberto Chiari, to express regret and urge a joint effort to maintain calm. President Chiari responded that all existing treaties between the two countries must be completely revised. Johnson was convinced. In April, 1964, after diplomatic relations were restored, both countries agreed to renegotiate the treaties.

In June 1967 Johnson and Marco Robles, Chiari's successor, announced that agreement had been reached on three treaties. Opposition from Congress, however, was so intense that Johnson never submitted them to the Senate for ratification. President Richard Nixon resumed negotiations in 1970. Four years later a set of principles were agreed to, negotiated by Kissinger and his Panamanian counterpart, Foreign Minister Juan Tack. The Kissinger-Tack Agreement (or Principles), as it became known, formally renounced sovereignty and explicitly stated that security for American interests was a function of consent, not coercion. It eliminated United States control over the Canal in perpetuity, and for these reasons the principles were hotly opposed. The Agreement, nonetheless, pre-figured the final outlines of the treaty that Carter would present to the Senate in 1977. When Gerald Ford took over as president, he also continued the negotiations. In 1976, during the presidential campaign, Ronald Reagan accused the Ford Administration of keeping a "mouselike silence" in the face of "blackmail" from Panama's "dictator." The public liked Reagan's rhetoric and Ford was convinced that he

lost several primaries because of the Canal issue.<sup>25</sup> Because of American elections, no further progress on the issue was made at that time. This is the situation that Carter inherited when he won the presidential election in 1976.

Carter, in general, fashioned a foreign policy tailored to the necessities and pressures of a pluralistic world and to the moral themes that the administration hoped would give authority to such policies. He tried to focus on a North-South axis, rather than East-West, dealing with the Soviet Union on an ad hoc basis. This was different from the Kissinger approach who viewed *the* problem of the age as the management of the Soviet Union as an emerging superpower, with regional problems being approached within that context. Both men faced the dilemma of trying to achieve a synthesis between the liberal view of a policy and the structure of power politics that was fundamentally still in place, no matter how modified it had become since 1945. This reconciliation for Carter was more difficult because of the nuclear advances made by the Soviet Union during the mid-seventies, and the weakening of the Western alliance, making Americans feel more vulnerable. The public tended to view issues within the East-West framework. The administration's efforts were complicated even further by energy security issues, a declining dollar, and by the erosion of American preeminence in world affairs. The dysfunction between a desired policy and world circumstances was acute during Carter's administration. The result, some argue, was to make judgments on a case by case basis, with no overarching framework.<sup>26</sup> Carter's strategy was one of adjustment and preventive diplomacy. Carter believed that the nation should work with smaller countries on a shared agenda of the principles of human rights and development.

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<sup>25</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 157-58; see "That Troublesome Panama Canal Treaty," *Time*, Monday, October 31, 1977, for a discussion of the opposition methods that the conservatives used.

<sup>26</sup> Moffett, *The Limits of Victory*, 59, 60, 61.

He wanted to pursue a global community based on mutual respect and multilateral cooperation.<sup>27</sup> He also understood the complexity of interdependence which in itself called for an altered approach to foreign policy. Hopes were high that the Canal treaty would send the same positive signal that the revocation of the Platt Amendment in 1934 had sent, and revolutionize American foreign policy with the Third World.<sup>28</sup>

#### THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S POLICIES

Carter states that before 1974 he was only vaguely aware of the argument over the Canal, and he was surprised that during his campaign for the presidency he got frequent questions about it. Even more striking was the intensity of emotion the subject aroused. For many, turning the Canal over to Panama symbolized the ills of the past decade: inflation, the energy crisis, Watergate, Vietnam, and the loss of economic and military supremacy. In other words, it seemed that the country was faced with its declining power to control events. However, the reality was that it was more difficult to control events in a pluralistic, interdependent, and complex world; and the utility of military force had declined, making other instruments of foreign policy more important. By the time the election was over, Carter knew that the United States had to come to terms with two facts: the need to begin negotiations immediately, and that the eventual agreement would have to include a phasing out of absolute control over the Canal Zone, giving Panama sovereignty. He relates that the decisions were not easy to make because by this time he recognized a stark dilemma: the administration would face a "terrible political fight in Congress" right at the beginning of his term. A flag-waving lobby in Congress had

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<sup>27</sup>Pastor, "The U.S. and the Caribbean: The Power of the Whirlpool," 28; see also Jerel A. Rosati, "Jimmy Carter, A Man Before His Time? The Emergence and Collapse of the First Post-Cold War Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 23 (summer 1993): 459-476.

<sup>28</sup>Moffitt, *The Limits of Victory*, 69; the Platt Amendment gave the United States certain rights of intervention in Cuba after the Spanish American War. It was passed by Congress in 1901.

already opposed renegotiation of the treaty and the House had voted to withhold any appropriations to pay for negotiations, an unprecedented move that was possibly unconstitutional. The administration hoped that the Senate would kill the measure,<sup>29</sup> but in the fall of 1975, the Senate passed a resolution that directly contravened the terms that would be offered to Panama. It opposed any new treaty and articulated strong opposition to relinquishing sovereignty. Thirty-eight senators, four more than the one-third needed to prevent ratification, sponsored the resolution. What's more, public opinion polls indicated that American opinion strongly opposed relinquishing control. Carter got endorsements for the treaty from both Kissinger and Ford, but Ronald Reagan turned him down saying he had heard nothing that changed his mind about "giving [the] Canal away."<sup>30</sup> Reagan believed that American foreign policy had been in retreat over the past years, and that "giving up Panama" would be another one, causing the country to lose respect from the rest of the world."<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, Carter believed that the treaty was essential, that the administration was certain to face a horrible political fight in the Senate, but that the nation needed on principle to correct an injustice. By correcting this, United States power and security would be enhanced. Furthermore, other Latin American nations were beginning to choose sides, and they were not choosing the United States. The issue was becoming a litmus test of how a superpower would treat a small defenseless country that had always supported the US.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> "Advance and Retreat," *Time Magazine* July 21, 1975, available at [www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,913274,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,913274,00.html), accessed 18 December 2006.

<sup>30</sup> CBS Evening News, Tuesday, August 16, 1977, Television News Archive, Vanderbilt University, available at <http://openweb.tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/1977-8/1977-08-16-CBS-1.html>, accessed 18 December 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Sol Linowitz to Cyrus Vance, May 2, 1977, Document 4, Carter Library, Atlanta, GA, available at [www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/panama/listofdocs.phtml](http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/panama/listofdocs.phtml), accessed 18 December 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 159, 160.

In spite of this strong opposition from Congress and the public,<sup>33</sup> Carter decided to push ahead with the project. They needed to do this during the expected “honeymoon” period of Carter’s presidency, before the issue could go south. Vance and Brzezinski both agreed on the urgency of the issue, because of the security issues surrounding the Canal, but they also comprehended the political risks involved. Vance had been Lyndon Johnson’s personal emissary during the violent anti-American riots in 1964, and believed that sooner or later Panama would “resort to major violence,” perhaps even destroying the Canal.<sup>34</sup> Carter appointed Ellsworth Bunker and Sol Linowitz (a Washington lawyer and former ambassador to the Organization of American States OAS) to lead the negotiating team. Linowitz believed that this issue could lead to a quick foreign policy success which would in turn give Carter leverage on other issues such as the SALT talks with the SU.<sup>35</sup> Carter believed that a failure to act quickly would lead to increasing resentment on the part of the Panamanians which could lead to attacks on the Canal. It was imperative to move before the issue fell once again below the political radar screen.

Shortly after Carter’s election a privately funded report was released by the Commission on US-Latin American Relations. It warned that a new Latin American policy must include a consistent pattern of global economic policies that would ensure a more equitable exchange between the industrialized countries and the newly expanding economies, many of which were in Latin America. The Commission saw Panama as a threat to the “latent [economic] opportunities in the Hemisphere. Otherwise, there were

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<sup>33</sup> See Ted J. Smith III and J. Michael Hogan, “Public Opinion and the Panama Canal Treaties,” 5-30 for an analysis of the perils of public opinion polling. Although the polls showed increased support as the process moved forward, the authors argue that the opposite was true. Flawed questions and numerous other errors skewed the results.

<sup>34</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 141; for a different view on the urgency of the Canal issue, see Stanley Hoffmann, “The Hell of Good Intentions”; “Good Neighbors Again?” *Time*, Monday, 3 January 1977.

<sup>35</sup> Moffitt, *The Limits of Victory*, 69.

no imminent threats to national security in the Americas. The report also characterized the Canal as “useful,” although no longer “vital,” to North American interests. If the problem could be solved, Latin America could again, as Walter LaFeber writes, “function as the laboratory for United States policies in the developing world.” It also asked for a “firm stance” on behalf of human rights on a continent suffering “a plague of repression.” The Carter Administration thus considered the Panama crisis as a key issue to be solved.<sup>36</sup>

A big obstacle to the treaties was the corruption and human rights abuses of the Torrijos regime. Nonetheless, Carter thought that the Panamanian government was strong enough to get ratification, and thus wanted to push ahead. Many Latin American experts believe that it was fundamentally in the interests of the United States to “support efforts to base development on individual autonomy, social equity, and civic participation rather than on repression.”<sup>37</sup> During the early 1970s the Panamanian National Guard had cracked down on graft, but by 1975 Guard officers themselves were accused of it. As unemployment rose, along with prices of basic commodities, stories about corruption increased. The Inter-American Commission on Human rights reported numerous violations of the basic right to life as well. It compiled a list of 34 people between 1969 and 1977 whose deaths were attributed to the government of Panama. Of these, 14 cases were considered to be of a political nature, and nine occurred as a result of confrontations with the National Guard.<sup>38</sup> These abuses raised questions in the Congressional hearings.

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<sup>36</sup> The Commission on United States-Latin American Relations, *The United States and Latin America*: in “Good Neighbors Again,” *Time*, 3 January 1977; LaFeber, *The Panama Canal*, 94.

<sup>37</sup> Lowenthal, “Rethinking U.S. Interests in the Western Hemisphere,” 16-17.

<sup>38</sup> See the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights “Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Panama,” 22 June 1978, available at [www.cidh.org/countryrep/Panama78eng/TOC.htm](http://www.cidh.org/countryrep/Panama78eng/TOC.htm), accessed 1 January 2007.

Appearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, John Cardinal Krol, Archbishop of Philadelphia, endorsed the need for a new treaty on behalf of the United States Catholic Conference. Indeed, they believed that a moral imperative existed for it because the 1903 treaty could not be reconciled with the concept of social justice. Krol believed that the notion of limited sovereignty was repugnant, and cited the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 as evidence of this. The symbolic significance of the moment was no less than the substantive significance, according to Krol. He also emphasized that an opportunity existed for the United States and Panama to signal “a new kind of relationship between large and small, industrialized and developing nations.” Other nations in the region were watching carefully. A new treaty would contribute to what Pope John XXIII called the common good in his encyclical on international relations, “Peace on Earth.” When questioned about violations of human rights by John Sparkman, Chairman of the Committee, Krol said he did not believe that violations of human rights in Panama should contribute to a rejection of the treaty any more than Soviet violations of human rights should interfere with the SALT discussions. He pointed out that the Catholic Conference of Bishops in Panama had problems with human rights, but still supported ratification of the treaty. Senator Joseph Biden of Delaware cited earlier testimony from Richard Eisenmann of the Panamanian Committee for Human Rights, which asserted that Panamanians lived in constant fear, with telephones tapped, mail intercepted, people arrested arbitrarily, and other such abuses perpetrated by the government, using every imaginable resource. He then asked if there was intimidation and control over the Catholic Church itself in Panama, to which Krol replied that he was unaware of any heavy handed repression or

limitation on freedom of religion. Testifying with Krol was the Reverend J. Bryan Hehir, Director, Office of International Justice and Peace, United States Catholic Conference. He told the story of a priest who had disappeared, then was found dead, with the cause never being adequately explained. The Panamanian bishops had spoken out on this, as well as on the expulsion of businessmen and the closing down of an opinion journal. However, they had not spoken about the whole list of things that caused concern to the Committee. In spite of it all, the Church supported the treaty because it offered a chance for Panama to move forward on issues of justice.<sup>39</sup> International justice on the Canals could open the way for internal justice.<sup>40</sup>

The most vociferous of the critics, however, focused on “strategic concerns.” There is no doubt that the very proximity of Latin American countries to the United States makes it a central security concern, especially the potential incursion of a hostile power, namely the Soviet Union in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although the military repeatedly emphasized the danger of sabotage and terrorism against the Canal,<sup>41</sup> the emerging “new right” (neoconservative) movement turned the issue into a global strategic retreat, language that resonated with a public still in the grip of the Cold War. Much of the opposition came from the House of Representatives, partly because it had the responsibility for the sale or transfer of American property in the Zone, but more so because it was “hotbed of anti-treaty sentiment.” One opponent, Representative Gene

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<sup>39</sup> U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations, *Panama Canal Treaties*, Executive N, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 10-14 October 1977.

<sup>40</sup> Although many Americans consider the Declaration of Independence with its “inalienable right” to be the source of the modern concept of human rights, and believe that the United States has the best record in the world on the issue, the Senate has consistently resisted ratification of treaties. For a discussion of this see Natalie Hevener Kaufman, *Human Rights Treaties and the Senate* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Congress, House Subcommittee on Inter-American Affairs, Hearings on the Panama Canal, 1971, “Panama Canal in Great Danger,” Ira C. Eaker, Lieutenant General, USAF, Ret. 92 Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., September 22, 1971.



Snyder (R-KY) amended a State Department appropriations bill so that no funds could be used for negotiating the surrender of American rights. It passed, with no committee hearings or significant debate, 246-164 on June 26, 1975.<sup>42</sup> The definition of “sovereignty” became a subject of endless debate.

*Congress, the Presidency and American Foreign Policy*

Following World War One, Congress became the major instrument in the crafting of foreign policy, beginning with a rejection of the country’s participation of the League of Nations, and culminating with the Neutrality Act (which became “permanent” in 1937), tying the hands of Franklin Roosevelt in the years running up to World War II. In hindsight, this was viewed as a disaster, and a new attitude emerged both during and after the war. The Soviet Union, like a plague, was something that had to be contained, and the executive branch gained vast new powers. With constant crises, the country needed a strong leader – the president.<sup>43</sup> A similar trend occurred in trade because of the passage of the Smoot-Hawley Tariff in 1931 which crippled international trade at the worst possible time. As the president’s power and prestige increased, Congress’s decreased. It also decreased because of a reluctance to use its available capabilities, and because foreign policy had become more bi-partisan, especially by the 1950s. Congressional influence reached its nadir in the late Johnson, early Nixon administrations. The events of the 1960s and 1970s – especially the war in Vietnam – led some in Congress to worry about an “imperial presidency.”<sup>44</sup> After the Vietnam War, Congress became more

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<sup>42</sup> LaFeber, *The Panama Canal*. 146

<sup>43</sup> See Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (New York: Free Press, 1990.) See his earlier work as well, *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership*, (New York: Science Editions, 1960).

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973); for a discussion on Congressional action to limit this imperial presidency, see Gordon Silverstein, *Imbalance of Powers: Constitutional Interpretation and the Making of American Foreign*

assertive, but ended up choosing its issues; the sale of arms to one country, or limitations on aid to another. Carter had a sharply accelerated agenda; and many have criticized him for trying too much too soon.<sup>45</sup>

The administration tried to work closely with Congress, especially the Senate, because it has the constitutional responsibility to advise and consent. However, eventually both houses held hearings on the treaties because of the intense interest surrounding them; also, both houses would have to pass implementing legislation. This seemed like a good place for Congress to try to be assertive, especially because electoral risk ranks high, especially with House members, when they evaluate the pros and cons of supporting big issues.<sup>46</sup> Also, Congress had its own foreign affairs agenda, and generally tried to ignore the White House from 1977 to 1980, being insistent on its prerogatives to decide, and confident in its abilities to do so.<sup>47</sup> It was by no means successful in this, however, It was part of Carter's personality that he pursued consensus. He not only wanted Congress to understand the complexities of the policies he presented, but also members of state legislatures, governors, and the American people. At Yazoo City, Mississippi, for example, Carter said that

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*Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) which argues that Congress has usually made the problem worse.

<sup>45</sup>See Barbara Hinckley, *Less Than Meets the Eye: Foreign Policy Making and the Myth of the Assertive Congress* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); see also Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. and Alfred de Grazia, *Congress and the Presidency: Their Role in Modern Times* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1967); and John C. Stennis and J. William Fulbright, *The Role of Congress in Foreign Policy* Rational Debate Seminars (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1971).

<sup>46</sup> See Hirach Gregorian, "Assessing Congressional Involvement in Foreign Policy: Lessons of the Post-Vietnam Period," *The Review of Politics* 46 (January 1984): 91-112; see also Elliot L. Richardson, "Checks and Balances in Foreign Relations," *The American Journal of International Law* 83 (October 1989): 736-739. See also Jerel A. Rosati, "Congressional Influence in American Foreign Policy: Addressing the Controversy," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 12 (fall 1984): 311-333.

<sup>47</sup> Robert D. Schulzinger, "Foreign Policy," *American Quarterly* 35 (spring-summer, 1983): 39-58, esp. 45.

Our Nation's international policies ought also to be understood by you, debated by you, discussed by you, argued by you, and ultimately, decided by you. We've got a great country, and what we want, obviously, is to have the true character of the United States of America demonstrated in every action we take, not only in our own domestic affairs but also throughout the world.<sup>48</sup>

Over time another dilemma presented itself. The attention given to the domestic players almost eclipsed that given to Panamanian concerns and this almost derailed the entire thing. The administration sought and got the help of former President Gerald Ford and former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger who both endorsed the Treaties. It also got the support of former Governor Averell Harriman of New York.<sup>49</sup> It was important that they be seen as a combined effort by both Democrats and Republicans. One of the major concerns about them was the protection of the Canal after the United States left Panama. Harold Brown, secretary of defense, and General George Brown emphasized that the Canal was anything but secure at the present time. Because of the anger surrounding the 1903 treaty in Panama, it was a prime target for terrorism. Both emphasized to the senators that the Treaties would provide security, not lessen it.<sup>50</sup> Brzezinski argued that on the key question of American intervention to protect the Canal the United States should stress what could happen if it did *not* intervene in response to Soviet initiatives in the region.<sup>51</sup> The Administration was never took the opportunity to explain the strong case *for* ratification. Instead it was almost immediately on the defensive and every speech, article, government publication urging ratification was directed toward the reasons why the Treaties would *not* do what critics claimed. They

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<sup>48</sup> See, for example, his speeches at Yazoo City, Mississippi and Charleston, SC, July 21, 1977.

<sup>49</sup> Letter from Landon Butler, Deputy Assistant to the President, to Averell Harriman 25 August 1977, Document number 6, available at <http://www.jimyncarterlibrary.org/documents/panama/listofdocs.phtml>. Accessed 14 October 2007.

<sup>50</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 148, 149.

<sup>51</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 135.

would not increase communist influence in the Western Hemisphere, weaken American defenses, deprive it of access to the Canal in an emergency, and impose burdensome costs on taxpayers.<sup>52</sup>

The Constitution divides the power to formulate foreign policy. It confers certain powers on the president, others on the Senate, and still others on Congress. Events usually determine which of these entities have the decisive and final voice on the direction of policy. The process is usually long and drawn out involving numerous actors and is comprised of many individual policies towards various countries, regions, and functional problems. Other factors such as the personalities of presidents and leading Congressmen influence the nature and direction of policy.

There are usually several steps in treaty making, including negotiations, signing, approval by the Senate, ratification by the president, exchange of ratifications by the parties involved, and proclamation, after which a treaty becomes legally binding. The president is responsible for all the steps except the “advice and consent” to ratification stage. Since the Senate must approve treaties by a two-thirds majority, it exercises considerable influence in their conclusion. The Senate has a number of options in its advice and consent powers. It can (1) approve a treaty by adopting a resolution of ratification without any conditions; (2) advise and consent to ratification while making its own views known in a committee report; (3) include in the resolution of ratification various “understandings” or “interpretations” with the implication that the treaty is being clarified, not changed; (4) add “reservations” to it with the purpose of modifying the substantive effect on the US; (5) amend it, making changes that require the agreement of the other parties in order to be legally binding; (6) fail to act on the treaty, blocking

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<sup>52</sup> Moffitt, *The Limits of Victory*, 109.

ratification; (7) reject it outright. Since the beginning of World War II, the Senate has seldom amended treaties and only occasionally attached reservations. It was customary to approve the treaty outright, or at most to attach understandings or interpretations. The Committee on Foreign Relations usually holds hearings on a proposed treaty, and then submits a report to the Senate. A fairly cumbersome parliamentary process mandated by Senate Rule 37 requires the Senate to act “as in the Committee of the Whole,” first considering amendments article by article and then reporting to the Senate for further consideration, after which the resolution of ratification and any reservations are considered. These procedures have usually been streamlined by unanimous consent since the 1940s, but when the Panama Canal Treaties were considered, unanimous consent was not granted and they were considered article by article in the Committee of the Whole procedure, then reservations to the resolution of ratification were considered. A simple majority is required for the attachment of an amendment or a reservation to the resolution of ratification. Only the final vote to agree to the resolution as amended, or a motion to postpone indefinitely, required a two-thirds majority. The rules are important to any understanding of the debate. This debate lasted 38 legislative days, the second longest in Senate history, after the debate on the Treaty of Versailles at the end of World War I.<sup>53</sup>

President Carter and General Omar Torrijos, president of Panama, concluded an agreement in principle in August 1977, which was signed in Washington on September 7, 1977 in a ceremony attended by representatives from more than 26 Western Hemisphere countries. Carter sent the Treaties to the Senate in mid-September, requesting that they be given “early and favorable consideration,” contending that they were fair to both

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<sup>53</sup> U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations, *Senate Debate on the Panama Canal Treaties: A Compendium of Major Statements, Documents, Record Votes and Relevant Events*, 96<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1979, 3-5.

countries and protected American interests better than the 1903 treaty,<sup>54</sup> thus achieving a synthesis of power and principle. The Treaties, designated Executive N, 95<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, were then referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. However, during 1977 a number of committees in both the House and Senate held hearings. Supporters argued that the treaties adequately protected American interests, since the United States would continue to operate the Canal until the year 2000, and after that would have the permanent right to maintain its neutrality. It was the operation of the Canal, not its ownership, that was the prime interest of the country; and that could best be achieved by a new arrangement with Panama. Opponents disagreed, and claimed that continued United States sovereignty over the area was essential to protect American interests, especially when dealing with the Torrijos government, which was characterized as left-leaning and pro- Castro. Strategic concerns were evident.<sup>55</sup>

The debate shifted from subject to subject as the hearings progressed, and approval of the treaties became doubtful. For example, the Senate Judiciary Committee's Separation of Powers Subcommittee argued that Congress, not the president, had the power to make the rules regarding the territory or other property belonging to the United States, and that the president could not transfer the Canal Zone to Panama by treaty alone. Therefore, separate legislation would have to be passed by both houses of Congress. The administration countered that Congress's power to dispose of property was not exclusive under the Constitution; and that the executive branch could do so with

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<sup>54</sup> U.S. Congress. Senate. Panama Canal Treaties – Message from the President Transmitting the Panama Canal Treaty and the Treaty Concerning the Permanent Neutrality and Operation of the Panama Canal. Executive N. 95<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, September 16, 1977. (Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977), vi.

<sup>55</sup> U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations, "Defense – Con: Senator Jesse Helms, Senator Orrin Hatch, Senator John Stennis," *Senate Debate on the Panama Canal Treaties: A Compendium of Major Statements, Documents, Record Votes and Relevant Events*, 96<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1979, 177-205.

a two-thirds approval by the Senate. The issue, however, would not go away, and over fifty House members joined in a court suit to require a role for their chamber on it. Several Senate members indicated that they would propose a reservation to the Treaties that would require action by both houses. Senator Robert Dole then proposed a series of amendments to the treaties, and against this backdrop the Senate Foreign Relations Committee began its hearings. There were apparent conflicts in the interpretation of the Neutrality Treaty by the American and Panamanian negotiators, which concerned the United States rights to take whatever action was necessary to defend the Canal and to head-of-the-line passage in emergencies. When these conflicts persisted and Senate approval seemed doubtful, the Administration began talks with Panama to clarify the disputed provisions. This led to the October 14, 1977 Statement of Understanding between Carter and Torrijos. The clarification specifically said that both the United States and Panama had responsibility for maintaining the security of the Canal, and that this did not give the United States any right of intervention in the internal affairs of Panama. Any American action would be directed at “insuring that the Canal will remain open, secure and accessible, and it shall never be directed against the territorial integrity or political independence of Panama.” Also, the Neutrality Treaty provides that United States and Panamanian war ships would be entitled to go to the head of the line to transit the Canal in an emergency.<sup>56</sup> Although this Statement of Understanding improved the chances for Senate approval, Congress adjourned without taking any action, and during the recess a number of Congressmen visited Panama. Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd raised the issue of human rights with Torrijos, who promised to repeal a number of repressive laws and improve conditions. Byrd also got assurances that Torrijos fully

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<sup>56</sup> Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, v. 13, October 17, 1977, p. 1547.

supported the October 14 Statement of Understanding.<sup>57</sup> Two other delegations also got assurances on the Statement, and the delegation of Senate Minority Leader Howard Baker raised the possibility that it would need to be incorporated into the treaty as a reservation.<sup>58</sup>

In January 1978 concern over the treaties shifted to financial issues.

Administration witnesses testified that the financial costs above and beyond the toll revenues would be quite substantial. The costs interests, however, never managed to coalesce, and the proceedings moved on. Additional hearings by the Foreign Relations Committee featured historians, legal scholars, transportation experts, and businessmen, and focused primarily on legal and financial questions. At the end of those hearings Byrd went before the Committee to recommend a procedure for consideration of the treaties. He said that he would actively support the treaties provided that the Neutrality Treaty was amended to incorporate the Carter-Torrijos Statement of Understanding. Since he had discussed this with Torrijos during his visit to Panama, as had the Baker delegation, and Torrijos had had no objections, Byrd thought that there would be no problems with Panama. These were subsequently incorporated into Articles IV and VI of the Neutrality Treaty. Byrd, in consultation with Baker, then suggested that the Foreign Relations Committee recommend certain changes to the Senate in its report, while reporting the resolutions of ratification without amendments. This would allow a large number of senators who were not members of the Foreign Relations Committee to cosponsor

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<sup>57</sup> U.S. Congress. Senate. *Report of the Senatorial Delegation to the Republic of Panama* [Senators Byrd, Huddleston, Matsunaga, Metzenbaum, Riegle, Sarbanes, and Sasser], November 9-12, 1977, 95<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., S. Document No. 95-79. (Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978).

<sup>58</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate. *Report of Delegation Studying the Panama Canal Treaties and Other Matters of Interest to the United States in Latin America* [Senators Baker, Garn and Chafee], 3-14 January 1978, 95<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., S. Document No. 95-80 (Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978).



amendments and reservations, including the Statement of Understanding, and thus share credit for them.<sup>59</sup>

The Senate was sharply divided over the treaties, as was the public, and the outcome was unclear until the very end. The administration responded quickly to the many objections. When many senators criticized the Treaties for giving only what they termed “ambiguous” protection for American interests, the administration responded swiftly, inviting Torrijos to the White House to work out an understanding that would eliminate any ambiguity. When senators argued that the understanding should be included in the Treaty, Carter acquiesced. Specific steps were part of a broader effort. White House and State Department staffs worked hard to help supporters and to help undecided to get on board. A major public relations effort was launched, with officials making approximately 1500 appearances around the country.<sup>60</sup> The debate was broadcast live over radio stations throughout the US. Public opinion can sometimes be fickle, and polling can sometimes mask underlying trend. The Carter Administration was encouraged that their early efforts seemed to reverse a general distaste for a treaty giving the Canal to Panama. Although the press believed that the public was (at least for the present) opposed to the treaties, by October 1977, the press was at least calling for an open and honest debate.<sup>61</sup>

The public, however, had not changed its mind. A great deal hinges on the information communicated in the polling questions that are asked. When follow-up

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<sup>59</sup> *Senate Debate on the Panama Canal Treaties: A Compendium*, 9, 10.

<sup>60</sup> I.M. Destler, “Treaty Troubles: Versailles in Reverse,” *Foreign Policy* 33 (Winter, 1978-79): 49, 50, 51.

<sup>61</sup> Memorandum to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance from Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Hodding Carter III, October 4, 1977, (WHCF) Document 8, available at <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/panama/listofdocs.phtml>. Accessed 14 October 2007. See also “Carter Wins on Panama,” *Time*, Monday, 27 March 27 1978.

questions, clarifying rights promised in the Byrd and Baker “leadership amendment” were tagged on to the basic question on support or rejection, opinion changed from negative to positive. Many misread these indicators, thinking that opinion was indeed changing from negative to positive. When all was said and done, nothing really changed. Virtually no inroads were made in undoing the American public’s “unrelenting distaste” for the Panama Treaties.<sup>62</sup>

The Senate used the Committee of the Whole procedure to consider the treaties article by article and attached amendments to them for the first time in fifty years. There were nearly 90 amendments or reservations considered. The final vote was 68 to 32, one vote more than the required two-thirds. A key group of undecided Senators had serious doubts about the Treaties but were willing to vote in favor, provided their concerns were met. This was the group that proposed the most reasonable amendments and reservations. Conservative opponents of the treaties, on the other hand, proposed amendment after amendment designed to kill the chances for passage.<sup>63</sup> Two reservations were especially important in convincing the undecideds. The Nunn-Talmadge reservation provided that nothing in the treaties prevented the United States and Panama from negotiating arrangements for a continued American presence in Panama after the year 2000.<sup>64</sup> The DeConcini reservation provided that “if the Canal is closed, or its operations are interfered with, the United States of America and the Republic of Panama shall each independently have the right to take such steps as each deems necessary..., including the use of military force in the Republic of Panama, to

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<sup>62</sup> Moffitt, *The Limits of Victory*, 112-126 passim; Smith III and Hogan, *Public Opinion and the Panama Canal Treaties of 1977*, 28.

<sup>63</sup> *Senate Debate on the Panama Canal Treaties: A Compendium*, 13.

<sup>64</sup> Condition No. 8 as Modified (previously numbered Unprinted Reservation No. 11), (Nunn et al.) March 14, 1978 (Congressional Record, S. 3649).

reopen the Canal or restore the operations of the Canal, as the case may be.”<sup>65</sup> The DeConcini reservation proved to be the most contentious.

Both liberals and conservatives saw the treaties debate as pivotal, presenting an opportunity for mobilizing supporters and consolidating organizational networks in anticipation of future battles. It was not the liberals strength that won the day, but the surprising (to some) political abilities of Carter. The opposition mounted a huge campaign, with a coalition of a long list of conservative organizations. Thousands of pieces of mail poured into the senate long before the vote was even close to being taken.<sup>66</sup>

The Carter administration, on the other hand, did not have access to as many interest groups as the conservatives, and resorted to other means. It relied on appeals to opinion leaders, direct Congressional lobbying, and a late television campaign for ratification by the president himself. Last minute arm twisting and log rolling were also necessary. For example, the administration switched positions on a government purchase of copper, an important public works project, and on a farm bill.<sup>67</sup> Liberal interest groups were disorganized and failed to rally public opinion. For example, one newly set up foreign policy lobby in the liberal camp was known as “New Directions,” and while it sent out 1.1 million mailings to liberal supporters it had a small operating budget and soon collapsed under the weight of its direct-mail effort.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Condition No. 83, as modified (DeConcini, et al.), March 16, 1978 (Congressional Record, S 3817).

<sup>66</sup> Moffett, *The Limits of Victory*, 171; see also Cecil V. Crabb, Jr. and Pat M. Holt, *Invitation to Struggle: Congress, the President and Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1980), 73.

<sup>67</sup> “Carter’s Panama Triumph – What it Cost,” *U.S. News and World Report*, March 27, 1978; “Carter Wins on Panama,” *Time*, March 27, 1978.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Hogan, *The Panama Canal in American Politics: Domestic Advocacy and the Evolution of Policy* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 120.

Another group, this time representing 200 major corporations accounting for 90% of American private investment in Latin America and the Caribbean, also campaigned on behalf of ratification. This was the Council of the Americas, and its members met with senators and opinion leaders, and courted broader business support. It did not, however, launch a grass roots effort because both the White House and the Council did not want it to appear that these were treaties written by and for Wall Street.<sup>69</sup> Besides weak interest group support, Carter received little in the way of help from the Democratic Party establishment. When he appealed to the Democratic National Committee for help, he found it to be lukewarm at best, endorsing “treaty negotiations” and the ratification process, but neglecting to endorse the treaties themselves.<sup>70</sup>

The administration really had few to depend on except themselves. They flew hundreds of influential local opinion leaders from around the country to the White House for briefings, hoping that these people would convince others in their communities to support the treaties. Carter also sent numerous cabinet members and their aides on extensive speaking tours, intensively lobbied uncommitted senators, and made a major television appeal shortly before the vote was to be taken. A day after A Palestinian terrorist raid on Israel, Carter still found time to telephone 16 opposing senators on behalf of the Treaty. One of those was Pete Domenici, a Republican from New Mexico. Although he did not change his “no” vote, he claimed to be impressed with Carter, saying “he was very serious, persistent, somber.” As a result he got one vote to switch, which

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<sup>69</sup>Hogan, *The Panama Canal in American Politics*, 102.

<sup>70</sup> Terence Smith, “Carter Asks Democratic Leaders to Help Him on Panama Treaties,” *New York Times*, October 8, 1977.

was all that he needed<sup>71</sup> He stressed the pragmatic benefits to the nation from the Treaties and the safeguards written into them that would protect American interests. He argued that the principle potential threats to the Canal came from resentful Panamanians if the treaties were rejected. Harold Brown indicated that the United States could not hope to protect the Canal from determined terrorists. "It is too vulnerable to a sack of dynamite – or to a glove in the gears."<sup>72</sup> Brown's appeal was seconded by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who also supported the treaties.<sup>73</sup>

Because of the public relations blitz, operational responsibility shifted away from the Bunker-Linowitz office and the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs to the Bureau of Congressional Relations. The people now involved were less sensitive to Panama and more sensitive to the senate. While it was clear that there was some resistance in Panama to particular reservations, two days before the vote American diplomats reported that the DeConcini Reservation was totally unacceptable. If Panamanians ultimately had to swallow it, this would undercut their political support for the future Canal regime. Time, however, was running out. Carter knew that the treaties themselves provided sufficient guarantees to protect the Canal and expedite passage of United States ships through it in the case of war or emergency; but many senators remained concerned; and Carter gave tacit assent to the so-called "leadership amendments" which attached the guarantees directly to the treaty. Carter was to meet with DeConcini 30 hours before the Senate vote and the administration knew his price. DeConcini wanted additional guaranteed written

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<sup>71</sup> Jimmy Carter, "The Treaties with Panama," Radio-Television Address February 1, 1978, in Elaine Adam, ed., *American Foreign Relations, 1977: A Documentary Record* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 348; "Carter Wins on Panama," *Time*, March 27, 1978.

<sup>72</sup> Harold Brown, "Challenges Confronting the National Security," address before the World Affairs Council of Northern California, San Francisco, July 29, 1977, in *AFP: 1977-1980 Document 4*, 12.

<sup>73</sup> David Skidmore, "Foreign Policy Interest Groups and Presidential Power: Jimmy Carter and the Battle over Ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 23 (summer 1993): 486.

into the treaty. At least one other senator linked his vote to the DeConcini condition. Carter endorsed DeConcini's demand, albeit reluctantly.<sup>74</sup>

According to I.M. Destler, available evidence suggested that Carter was not briefed on the potency of Panama's objections. Warren Christopher, Deputy Secretary of State, when asked by Carter how objectionable the reservation would be, replied that it would cause problems but nothing that could not be "handled." Ultimately, they were handled, but it took valuable time, and Carter found his policy damaged abroad and his victory stained at home.<sup>75</sup>

The day after the vote on the Neutrality Treaty, news reports indicated that Panamanians were fuming about the DeConcini reservation because it appeared to give the United States the right to intervene in Panama. According to the reports, Torrijos had written to Carter expressing his concern and to explain the problems that would be posed for Panama if the Senate approved it. He indicated that Panama would not accept any reservation that changed the objectives of the Treaty or that impaired Panamanian sovereignty over all of its territory. Opposition in Panama grew rapidly, even as the Panama Canal Treaty was being debated in the United States. The Torrijos government circulated a letter of protest to the United Nations as well as to certain heads of state. The Senate found a way to compromise by adopting a reservation to the Panama Canal Treaty. It provided that any action taken by the United States would be only for the purpose of assuring that the Canal would remain open, not for intervention in the internal affairs of Panama.<sup>76</sup> The vote was taken on April 18, 1978, and the Panama Canal Treaty

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 487.

<sup>75</sup> I.M. Destler, "Treaty Troubles: Versailles in Reverse," 52.

<sup>76</sup> Unprinted Reservation No. 36 (Byrd, Baker, DeConcini, et al.) April 18, 1978 (Congressional Record, S 5746).

was approved 68 to 32, again, one vote more than the two-thirds needed. Carter had spent an enormous amount of political capital in the endeavor. The opposition remained loud and vocal, citing strategic concerns, especially about the Soviet Union's intentions and opportunities within the region. Two recall movements against DeConcini were launched by Arizona soon after he voted to approve the treaties, but failed to succeed. It was a huge achievement for Carter, having succeeded against extraordinarily high odds. It was an astonishing feat considering that one of the greatest legislative leaders in American history, Woodrow Wilson, failed to secure the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles.

*Carter's Success Versus Wilson's Failure*

The Carter administration worked closely with Congress, especially the Senate, because of its power to advise and consent. At the same time, the House was certainly not ignored. It wanted to play a larger role than usual in the process of ratification because of the amount of concern the treaties generated; furthermore, it would have to pass implementing legislation. Carter also enlisted the help of former President Gerald Ford and former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who both endorsed the Treaties; and he wrote personal letters to various senators. It was important that its passage be seen as a bipartisan effort. Carter also compromised on the reservations which were attached to the Treaties, while Wilson would not.<sup>77</sup> By accepting the DeConcini reservation, it seemed as if some senators had strengthened the treaties, in spite of Carter. This gave them cover for their "yes" vote. Carter understood and accepted this.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>See, for example, "Letter to U.S. Senators, November 5, 1977," [Staff Secretaries File] Document 14, Jimmy Carter Library and Museum, available at <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/panama/document14.pdf>. Accessed 13 October 2007.

<sup>78</sup>Skidmore, "Foreign Policy Interest Groups," 488; see also William L. Furlong and Margaret Scranton, *The Dynamics of Foreign Policy-Making: The President, The Congress and the Panama Canal Treaties* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984.)

Wilson did not work closely with Congress on the Treaty of Versailles. This is somewhat strange, considering that he was an extremely able legislative leader. Usually, he worked with Congress, and had a high degree of success.<sup>79</sup> Some of his tactics can be summarized as follows: lead, but do not dictate; be a good listener and work toward a consensus; appear personally in Congress; cultivate doubtful supporters; work with conservatives and progressives alike; and give individual attention to members of Congress. He wrote that “Leadership and control must be lodged somewhere; the whole art of statesmanship is the art of bringing the several parts of government into effective co-operation for the accomplishment of particular objects – and party objects at that.”<sup>80</sup> One of the probable reasons he did not follow these tactics on the Treaty of Versailles was that he was not well. In Paris, in April 1919, he became ill, and although he was incapacitated for only a few days, he returned to work with some new eccentricities. For example, he was suspicious, inconsiderate, less alert, less poised, and more emotional. He never really recovered. Back home he was stricken once again on his September tour of the country, and returned to Washington where he was stricken again.<sup>81</sup> Clearly, he was in no shape to try for a third term in 1920. Wilsonian Democrats, who favored the League of Nations, urged the president to compromise with the Republicans in the senate, the “reservationists” led by Henry Cabot Lodge, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Wilson refused, believing that compromise meant “nullify.” Also,

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<sup>79</sup> Josephus Daniels, a former secretary, commented that “Every measure which President Wilson urged upon the legislative branch was enacted into law until he was stricken on his Western trip in September, 1919.” See Josephus Daniels, *The Life of Woodrow Wilson, 1856-1924* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1924), 203.

<sup>80</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *Constitutional Government in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1908), 54.

<sup>81</sup> See Walter C. Alvarez, “Cerebral Arteriosclerosis,” *Geriatrics*, I (1946): 189-216. Wilson’s illness was cerebral thrombosis – the blocking of an artery in the brain with consequent destruction of part of the brain. The illness may last for many years, punctuated by attacks as additional arteries close, and may have varying effects on the victim.



in spite of his illness, Wilson left open the possibility that he might run for a third term. The idea of a third term, plus his illness, frustrated compromise on the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>82</sup> The issue of a peace agreement between Germany and the United States was left for the next administration to handle.<sup>83</sup>

Carter, on the other hand, was never held hostage to reelection. He believed in the justice of the Panama Canal Treaties, and pursued what he believed to be right. One might argue that the fight over these Treaties came early in his administration and that he had time to repair any damage to his 1980 chances for reelection. However, he demonstrated this same kind of imperviousness to his reelection in the Iranian hostage crisis, which took place in 1979-1980, knowing that if the hostages were not released he would lose the election. Carter also followed Wilson's formula for success in leading a legislative battle – something that Wilson could not or would not do when it came to the Versailles Treaty.

Kissinger supported the Treaties, noting that “the case for ratifying the Panama Canal Treaties...is not an immediate present danger in Panama but the need to forestall a united front of *all* the countries of Latin America against what they consider an American attempt to maintain inequity by force.”<sup>84</sup> He strongly supported President Carter in his

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<sup>82</sup>See Wesley M. Bagby, “Woodrow Wilson, A Third Term, and the Solemn Referendum,” *The American Historical Review* 60 (April, 1955): 567-575.

<sup>83</sup>The Knox Joint-Peace Resolution was passed by both houses of Congress and approved by the President on July 2, 1921. This gave statutory recognition to the state of peace already in existence. A further treaty, the Treaty of Berlin, was subsequently signed, in which Germany acknowledged as legitimate the claims asserted on behalf of the United States in exchange for the benefits of the resumption of diplomatic relations. This was signed on August 25, 1921 and took effect on November 11, 1921. The United States retained all the privileges of the Treaty of Versailles, but none of the responsibilities. See Hessel E. , “The Treaties with Germany and Compensation for War Damage,” *Columbia Law Review* 23 (June 1923): 511-527. See also Kurt Wimer and Sarah Wimer, “The Harding Administration, the League of Nations, and the Separate Peace Treaty,” *The Review of Politics*, 29 (January 1967): 13-24.

<sup>84</sup>Henry Kissinger “Continuity and Change in American Foreign Policy,” Arthur K. Salomon Lecture, September 19, 1977, Graduate School of Business Administration, New York University, NY in *For the Record* (Boston: Little, Brown Company, 1981), 75.

fight for ratification; both on their own merits and also because of the profound consequences of a failure to ratify that went far beyond Panama. He said that he believed a defeat would weaken the president's international authority at the beginning of his term. It would suggest to friends and foes around the world that the United States could not deliver on an agreement negotiated by four presidents of both political parties over a period of at least 13 years; that it could not perceive its own interests in Western Hemisphere cooperation, and that shifting emotions and institutional stalemates produced erratic behavior in the most powerful country in the world. Kissinger believed that America was the anchor for the free world's security, and the best hope for progress. He believed that, if every four years the basic premises of its foreign policy changed, America itself would become an element of instability in the world.<sup>85</sup>

*The Perception of the Treaties in Latin America and Elsewhere*

The Treaties were recognized in Latin America as a positive major step forward in its relationship to the US, but the plebiscite in Panama passed by a narrow margin. The major complaint was that the United States would maintain control for too long. Another complaint was that America would share little in the management of the waterway, and that it retained the right to intervene in perpetuity to defend the Canal's neutrality.<sup>86</sup>

The argument over sovereignty went on in both nations. Unlike the Panamanians who believed that the Americans retained the right to intervention, detractors in the United States charged that this had been given away. And, although there were

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<sup>85</sup>Kissinger, "The Future of American Foreign Policy," Address to the annual convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Washington DC, April 10, 1980 in *For the Record*, 89.

<sup>86</sup> Ambler H. Moss, Jr., "The Panama Treaties: How an Era Ended, *Latin American Research Review* 21 (1986): 171, 172.

conservatives who supported the Treaties, such as John Wayne and William F. Buckley, the rhetoric surrounding the issue became shriller. The neoconservatives centered their opposition on sovereignty and nationalism, and failed to capitalize on a central vulnerability the Treaties might have had in the economic area: the increase in tolls, estimated by the administration to be 30 percent, a figure that was consistently, but not effectively, challenged.<sup>87</sup> Panama, in the eyes of some, got a poor deal because it was guaranteed only \$10 million per year and another \$10 million from the surplus accumulated from operating revenues. Other revenues would depend on the tolls generated, and estimates ranged from \$2.5 million to \$60 million.<sup>88</sup> It would take large toll revenues to handle the government's debt.<sup>89</sup>

Others argued that the costs to the United States were too high. Maritime interests, in particular, thought they were casualties of new forces that were reshaping old patterns of commerce, but their interests never coalesced with others whose economic interests were also challenged, such as port cities on the East Coast of the country which were being undermined by the expansion of rail, and Midwest farmers who feared the increased tolls.<sup>90</sup> The argument over costs delayed, but did not stop, the passage of legislation which would implement the Treaties.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Moffitt, *The Limits of Victory*, 196-198; see also Jeane Kirkpatrick, "US Security & Latin America," *Commentary Magazine*, January, 1981.

<sup>88</sup> Richard Falk, "Panama Treaty Trap," *Foreign Policy* 30 (spring 1978): 70.

<sup>89</sup> LaFeber, *The Panama Canal*, 202.

<sup>90</sup> Moffitt, *The Limits of Victory*, 185.

<sup>91</sup> The Panama Canal Act of 1979 was the implementing legislation. It created the Panama Canal Commission. When the Commission was modified in 1987, Ronald Reagan stated that he was pleased to sign it because it would "continue to protect the national interest of the United States in the continued, uninterrupted availability and safe, efficient operation of the Panama Canal at no cost to the ... taxpayers." "Ronald Reagan: Statement on Signing the Panama Canal Commission Authorization Act," John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online], (Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted), Gerhard Peters (database). Available at [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws), accessed 22 December 2006.

Some critics argued that the debate over the Treaties was so narrow that it was a conversation between the sentimental imperialists who did not favor ratification, and rational imperialists who did. Much of the rhetoric was imperialistic and jingoistic, and centered on the right to intervene in Panama to uphold American interests, including the right to intervene in Panamanian domestic affairs. The right to intervention, according to some, amounted to the United States stumbling into an open-ended commitment to intervene in a “shaky Third World country, without even considering proprieties or costs.”<sup>92</sup>

The question on intervention began to become critical in the mid to late 1980s as Panama came under both Congressional and administration scrutiny. Television documentaries which aired in America showed drug trafficking, corruption in the military establishment, and political manipulation by the military. There was rioting in the streets. The country could not seem to move forward, away from a military dictatorship toward a genuine civilian government. Congressional hearings were held in June, 1987. In his testimony before the House Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs, Ambler H. Moss, Jr., Dean, Graduate School of International Studies, University of Miami, pointed out that American interests in Panama remained safe as long as Panama remained prosperous and stable. He also pointed out that the economy was in trouble, and this was providing opportunities for the Soviets and other leftist governments. Scholarships for Latin American students increased significantly at the Lumumba University in Moscow and related institutions. Moss estimated that at least 1000 Panamanians were studying in

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<sup>92</sup> Richard Falk, “Panama Treaty Trap,” 69.

communist countries at any given time.<sup>93</sup> Dr. Richard I. Millett, Professor of History at the University of Southern Illinois, urged the United States to act with extreme caution, doing nothing to indicate that it would not uphold the 1977 Treaties. Nor should the country tie itself, or appear to tie itself, to any particular faction. It should not “mortgage our security and economic interests to the internal conditions in this country....”<sup>94</sup>

The situation continued to deteriorate in Panama. In 1985-86 the Reagan administration provided “Security Supporting Assistance” for the military regime under Manuel Noriega, in the amount of \$63.2 million. The rationale of this military buildup, which further strengthened the military regime, was the Panamanian’s expanding role in defending the Canal, pursuant to the 1977 agreements. In 1987 Noriega was accused of fixing the 1984 election and was also implicated in the death of Torrijos, who died in a mysterious plane crash in 1981. Demonstrations broke out again, and Reagan began to backpedal, looking for ways to get rid of him. His answer was economic sanctions. As the Panamanian economy descended into chaos Noriega himself continued to make money by drug trafficking and collected \$40 million each month from American military spending, \$470 million annually from the Canal, and millions more from United States corporations.<sup>95</sup> Senator Alphonse D’Amato, R-NY, who was especially involved in fighting drug trafficking, described Reagan’s friendship with, then opposition to, Noriega thus: “The administration set its hair on fire and tried to put it out with a hammer.”<sup>96</sup>

When George H.W. Bush assumed office in 1989, he increased pressure on Noriega, who declined to run in the Panamanian election, but chose another puppet,

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<sup>93</sup> House Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs, “Recent Developments in Panama,” Hearings on H. Cong. Res. 149, 100<sup>th</sup> Cong. 1<sup>st</sup> sess. June 18, 24, and 25, 1987, 30-32;

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 39, 40.

<sup>95</sup> Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal*, 211.

<sup>96</sup> *US News and World Report*, May 23, 1988, 26.

Carlos Duque. The Bush administration provided the opposition, Guillermo Endara, with \$10 million; and Carter went to Panama to monitor the election. But when Duque was seen to be losing, Noriega seized the ballot boxes. The opposition took to the streets in protest and the “dignity battalions” assaulted them. Endara and the vice-presidential candidate, Guillermo Ford, were severely beaten. Noriega declared the election void, installed another puppet, and in October 1989 survived a coup that was openly supported by American forces. President Bush ended up humiliated. The United States launched a full-scale attack (Operation Just Cause) with 24,000 troops on December 20, 1989. Bush explained this by saying that Noriega had declared a “state of war with the United States and publicly threatened the lives of Americans in Panama.”<sup>97</sup> American casualties ran into the hundreds and Panamanian into the thousands. Noriega sought refuge in the Papal Nunciature, but under pressure from the Vatican, surrendered to the Vatican Embassy on January 3, 1990. Under an agreement worked out with the American-created government, led by Guillermo Endara, he was brought to the United States for trial and sentenced to 40 years for cocaine trafficking, racketeering and money laundering. He was also ordered to pay \$44 million to the Panamanian government.<sup>98</sup>

Secretary of State James A. Baker III justified the intervention by invoking Article 51 of the UN Charter and Article 21 of the Charter of the OAS, which entitle the United States to act in self defense. Questions quickly arose on the validity of American action on the basis of the stated reasons which included 1) safeguarding the lives of

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<sup>97</sup> Statement by the President [Bush, H.W.] December 20, 1989, Office of the Press Secretary, the White House; see William L. Furlong, “Panama: The Difficult Transition towards Democracy,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 35 (autumn, 1993): 19-64 for a discussion of the problems facing Panama in the 1990s.

<sup>98</sup> Charles Maechling, Jr., “Washington’s Illegal Invasion,” *Foreign Policy* 79 (summer 1990): 121.

American citizens; 2) restoration of democracy; 3) integrity of the Panama Canal Treaties; and 4) apprehending Noriega. The most pertinent issue for the purposes of this chapter concerns the Panama Canal Treaties. The Canal Treaties provide that Panama grants the United States the rights necessary to protect and defend the canal and describes the rights in detail. There was no threat to the Canal in the minds of some when the Americans invaded.<sup>99</sup> On the other hand, Noriega's swaggering, arrogant; stance could easily have escalated, putting many lives in danger, along with the Canal. Congress seemed aloof to the invasion and never challenged it under the War Powers Resolution. This was probably due to three intersecting things: they were in recess when the invasion occurred; the invasion was popular with the American people as was President Bush; and the mission was almost over by the time Congress reconvened in January.<sup>100</sup> So ends the controversy over the sovereignty issue – with a bang not a whimper. It seems clear that whether sovereignty over the Canal Zone lies with Panama or with the United States, the United States can and will intervene if and when its interests are threatened. On the other hand, it strengthened the executive branch's assertion that the War Powers Act is unconstitutional. Congress has failed to muster the will to demand faithful execution of the law. Carter was the most supportive, although his position "was never fully voiced or tested."<sup>101</sup>

After the invasion of Panama, some in the press questioned the usefulness of the Canal. One wonders why. The Canal continues to grow in importance to the United

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<sup>99</sup> Ved P. Nanda, "The Validity of United States Intervention in Panama Under International Law," *The American Journal of International Law* 84 (April 1990): 497.

<sup>100</sup> Eileen Burgin, "Congress, the War Powers Resolution, & the Invasion of Panama," *Polity* 25 (winter 1992): 235-241.

<sup>101</sup> See Joseph R. Biden and John B. Ritch III, "The War Power at a Constitutional Impasse," *The Georgetown Law Journal*, 77 (1988): 392-393.

States and the rest of the world. It allows the United States Navy to move all but the largest aircraft carriers between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, without incurring the costs, both in time and money, of the trip around Cape Horn. It is also a vital link in the global economy, with a projection of 220 million tons of commerce moving through it by the year 2010. This trade would cease to move if the Canal became unavailable.

The security of the Canal depends not so much on conventional military strength as it does on American domestic and international policies that promote political stability, economic progress, and social justice. It also depends on the quality of service that Panama can provide to the international community. This would discourage any but the most irrational actor from trying to make mischief. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the region has been a source of raw materials, bases, and other types of support that have contributed to the achievements of American goals. At the same time, the United States has denied access to these resources to others. This has not changed. What has changed is the nature of the threats to the Canal and the region as a whole. In the past there were conventional threats centering on European expansion; and the responses were traditional military fortifications, such as offsetting the entrance and exit channels to the locks; and land, sea, and air bases throughout the Caribbean Basin to the Atlantic Narrows. With the end of the Cold War, the nature of the threats changed. The changing nature of contemporary conflicts appears to be the greatest danger. Enemies can resort to political-psychological conflict at the lowest rung of the warfare ladder. Carter saw this, and acted with courage in pushing early for a treaty with Panama. The solution to these kinds of problems lies within Panama itself. It should continuously strengthen its domestic



society by building up its economic bases so that society in general is not interested in causing damage to the Canal. The public's perception of well being is essential.<sup>102</sup>

The Canal is a potentially divisive issue for Panamanians today. The proposed expansion of the locks to allow the passage of "post-Panamax" ships, those too wide to fit through the current locks, has generated a great deal of discussion over the costs and who would bear them as well as the competence of the government to administer the project. With more than 100 post-Panamax ships coming online, the Canal is outdated. Backups, although not critical, are currently pushing some customers to seek alternate routes, and as a result most Panamanians accept the need for expansion. The Canal is a major source of revenue for the country, but not a major source of jobs, so many have some doubts that the expansion will directly benefit them.<sup>103</sup>

In 1999, the transfer was "heavy on symbolism, light on change," according to a CNN report. Other than a change in stewardship, and perhaps less English being spoken, things remained essentially the same. Conservatives complained that the Canal could come under the influence of unfriendly governments, citing the fact that a Hong Kong company, Hutchison Whampoa, was awarded a contract to manage two ports at either end of it. They believed that eventually Beijing would control it. The State Department has found no evidence that the company has ties to Beijing. Caspar Weinberger, Reagan's defense secretary, voiced concern to Congress that there could be a disruption in keeping the Canal open. But it is not the communists that the United States has to fear at this time. Robert Pastor has said that it is a stretch to believe that China could take

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<sup>102</sup> See Max G. Manwaring, "The Security of Panama and the Canal: Now and in the Future," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 35 (autumn 1993): 151-170; see also Fernando Manfredo, Jr., "The Future of the Panama Canal," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 35 (autumn 1992): 103-128.

<sup>103</sup> "Panama Canal is Divisive Issue," *The Virginian Pilot*, October 22, 2006.

over the Canal, 10,000 miles away, when they cannot even take Taiwan, 90 miles away. Also, "in the new century, the continued ability of the United States to lead will depend on the partnerships we forge around the world. The best place to start is with our friends in Panama. We will demonstrate our greatness twice if we exhibit as much pride in transferring the canal at the end of the century as we did in building it at the beginning." If anything, it operates more efficiently than it did under United States control. For example, the average crossing took 33 hours in 1999; in 2004 it took less than 23.<sup>104</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The Treaties passed, but just barely. This was a huge achievement for the Carter administration, but it became a pyrrhic victory. Just 15 months after his inauguration he produced the ratification of treaties that had been in the making for at least 13 years, under four administrations. However, instead of giving him leverage on other issues, such as SALT, as Linowitz had anticipated, it gave potency to the neoconservative movement. Some likened the withdrawal from Panama to the withdrawal from Vietnam. The debate catalyzed public fears of retreat and created the environment that tended to compromise ratification efforts. Instead of re-capturing a foreign policy consensus, the Treaties became a lightning rod which exacerbated the divisions remaining from Vietnam. Carter paid an enormous price for ratification, and for the remainder of his presidency was "forced to live on borrowed time." Although Brzezinski was confident and optimistic about the future, the reality was quite different. Congress had a growing

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<sup>104</sup> Robert A. Pastor, "A Century's Journey in Panama." Available at <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/1999/panama.canal/>. Accessed 10 February 2007; Tom Carter, "Panama Canal Operating Smoothly," *Washington Times*, June 11, 2004, available at [www.washingtontimes.com/functions/](http://www.washingtontimes.com/functions/), accessed 22 December 2006; Steve Nettleton, "Transfer Heavy on Symbolism, Light on Change," CNN "Panama Canal Handover," available at [www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/1999/panama.canal](http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/1999/panama.canal), accessed 10 February 2007.

animosity to Carter, on whatever he initiated. Victory hindered future hopes and plans, it did not aid them. At the time, however, the Treaties were recognized in Latin America as a major, positive step in enhancing the relations between the United States and its hemispheric neighbors.<sup>105</sup>

The pressures to accommodate the domestic audience were acute during ratification. Congress was far more assertive than it had been prior to the Vietnam imbroglio, and Carter naturally turned his attention to winning over opponents at home. When he accepted the DeConcini reservation, he immediately had to try to repair the damage with Panama. Aids tried to soften the reservation, but DeConcini would not “yield what he had just won.” As a result Panama lost some of its confidence in the administration and sought other avenues of influence.<sup>106</sup> The State Department asked William Rogers to serve as an intermediary, leading Washington to conclude that Carter had messed up, not that he achieved ratification. Additionally, unfounded international expectations can and did lead to domestic upsets. When Carter agreed to DeConcini, some senators thought that this was an indication that the reservation was acceptable to Panama. This was not the case, and caused Baker to denounce Panama for upsetting the efforts at ratification. However, it was Carter’s excellent management of Congress in this instance, his ability to get Kissinger and Ford to stand behind him, his flexibility, and his ability in the end to get Panama to agree to the compromises that pushed the ratification through. Other issues of the late 1970s also played a role in the perception of failure.

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<sup>105</sup> Moffitt, *The Limits of Victory*, 108, 110-111, 196, 204; Skidmore, “Foreign Policy Interest Groups,” 490; Ambler H. Moss, Jr., “The Panama Treaties: How an Era Ended, 71-178. Moss points out that the treaties would never have been ratified during a Nixon or Ford administration. It was Carter’s total commitment to them that carried the day; see also Lowenthal, “Rethinking U.S. Interests in the Western Hemisphere,” 1-23.

<sup>106</sup> See Memorandum from Robert Pastor to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Getting the Panama Debate Back on Track,” April 10, 1978, available at <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/panama/document17.pdf>. Accessed 13 October 2007.

These included the lack of satisfactory progress on SALT II (for some detractors of SALT this might mean too much progress), the decision not to develop the neutron bomb, concern about the Soviet and Cuban activity in southern Africa, and the accusation that the Soviets violated the code of détente.<sup>107</sup>

The international moral norm against colonialism which emerged after World War II played a role in the passage of the Treaties. When little progress was made under Nixon, in spite of repeated warnings that the Canal was open to sabotage and terrorist attacks, Torrijos decided to turn the Canal issue into a Canal problem for the US. In January 1973 he invited the UN Security Council to hold a special session in Panama. George Bush, the Ambassador to the United Nations at the time, correctly believed that Torrijos would make the focus of the special session Panama and the Canal. Bush tried, without success, to sidetrack the session. Torrijos tried, with great success, to make the Canal problem a problem for the world, making his case in the language of colonialism. This changed the parameters of the debate from the overarching security of Latin America to a debate over the American presence in Panama. This soon led to the Kissinger-Tack principles which were the bases for the Treaties.<sup>108</sup>

The Treaties battle ended with a victory for the larger interests of the United States, Latin America, and the rest of the world; and it recognized the sovereign equality of all Western Hemisphere nations.<sup>109</sup> The acceptance of Panama (sometimes a forgotten partner to the treaty) was crucial, and Carter delivered on this as well. Without Panamanian approval, the United States would have been left with its big ditch, but would have been surrounded by hostile elements. The furor from the opposition, and all

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<sup>107</sup> I.M. Destler, "Treaty Troubles: Versailles in Reverse," 56.

<sup>108</sup> McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy* 126-130.

<sup>109</sup> "Beyond the Panama Treaties," *New York Times*, 28 January 1978.

the rhetoric about abandoning the national interests, could have sabotaged what was truly in the national interests. The costs of turning over the Canal to Panama seem to be negligible, except to the political ambitions of Carter. After passage, however, there remained a deep fear among the population that America was surrendering part of its primacy and the changes that would go with it. This has not been the case. After a flurry of renewed anxiety as the hand over of the Canal approached in 1999, the issue has receded to the vanishing point, along with much of the rest of Latin America, at least from the vantage point of 2008. The Canal continues to be efficient, serving the international community well, and commerce through it continues to grow.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISARMING THE WORLD

#### INTRODUCTION

One of the promises that candidate Carter made in 1976 was to return morality to United States foreign policy. One way that President Carter tried to do that was by joining the issues of human rights and arms control. This chapter focuses on Carter's attempts to limit the transfer of arms and its intersection with human rights, while trying to act in the national interest. It examines the Conventional Arms Transfer (CAT) restraint policy and the Arms Export Control Act, under which Carter functioned. It also examines Presidential Directive 13 (PD13), which was a set of guidelines for a new arms export policy. (PD13 was formally rescinded on July 8, 1981 by the Reagan administration.) It argues that the administration was moderately successful in limiting arms transfers to certain nations, and was very successful in slowing the growth in arms sales overall, in spite of strong opposition. Crafting the policy was one thing – carrying it out would prove more difficult, as it became clear that there were pragmatic limits to Carter's hope for a ban on arms sales. For one thing, it was difficult to deal with the domestic challenges of a strong military culture and the habit of intervening in the affairs of other states, in spite of a public that was fed up with both, and which was also revolted by the subversion of foreign governments and the United States support of corrupt dictatorial regimes.<sup>1</sup> A strong resurgence of the political right undercut Carter's efforts as

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<sup>1</sup> Miles D. Wolpin, *America Insecure*, 31; see also Lucy Wilson Benson, "Turning the Supertanker: 5.

well.<sup>2</sup> Also, although he tried to move the nation's focus away from solely East-West issues, those issues had not disappeared, and they needed more attention than perhaps he might have wished. East-West tensions also made countries that were in the Western camp more reluctant to curb arms transfers to friendly governments.

Carter also faced a more assertive Congress, eager to play a role in foreign policy decisions, and arms transfers were one vehicle for achieving this. In 1976 Congress passed the International Security and Arms Export Control Act, or simply the Arms Export Control Act (AECA). This played a major role in Congressional involvement because it set the parameters within which the executive branch could act. Another restraint on Carter was the defense industry which, along with the Pentagon and Congress, had formed an "iron triangle." Congress, however, was now less willing to rubber stamp defense outlays and became a wild card, an unpredictable player.<sup>3</sup> In addition, it had already added human rights clauses to most all foreign assistance legislation, in an effort to constrain the executive in the realm of arms transfers.<sup>4</sup> Although the Carter administration believed strongly in human rights, other entrenched interests, such as the Foreign Service bureaucracy, very strongly supported arms transfers as a way to gain influence in other countries, especially those governed by right wing dictators.<sup>5</sup> There were also human rights clauses in the legislation which banned sales to countries which engaged in a "consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights." Thus, Carter was caught between the competing forces of

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<sup>2</sup>Miles D. Wolpin, *America Insecure*, 19; see also David Skidmore, *Reversing Course: Carter's Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and the Failure of Reform I* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup>Joanna Spear, *Carter and Arms Sales: Implementing the Carter Administration's Arms Transfer Restraint Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1995), 39.

<sup>4</sup>Miles D. Wolpin, *America Insecure* 31.

<sup>5</sup>See David F. Schmitz, *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1965-1989* (Cambridge: University Press, 2006).

power and principle – those advocating business as usual and those seeking to regain some moral high ground after the Vietnam War. He believed, however, that American foreign policy had to reflect basic American values of justice and propriety. It is in the interests of the United States to project an image of this country as being a beacon of hope for oppressed peoples. If it treats others in a way that is incompatible with the way it treats its own people it lessens the impact of that example. In addition, human rights violations are symptomatic of other ills in society, which may in turn negatively affect American interests.<sup>6</sup>

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The international sale and transfer of military armaments is not new in history. It does, in fact, date back to ancient times, and is usually seen as a legitimate function of government. As early as the 1820s, the United States was interfering both diplomatically and with arms in some Latin American countries engaged in a struggle for independence from Spain. In the 1830s arms exports supported the Texan insurgency against Mexico.<sup>7</sup> The United States became a major exporter of arms during World War One, and by 1920 exported 52.1 percent of the global transfers. Over the next decade and a half, however, this figure declined, and by 1937 exported only 9.3 per cent.<sup>8</sup> During World War Two, America's industrial might out-produced every other nation, and it spent three or four times as much on arms as any other belligerent. At the end of World War Two it was still regarded as the arsenal of democracy. It was envied and admired throughout the world, thanks to policies such as the Marshall Plan. As hostility became openly apparent between two former Allies, the United States and the Soviet Union, and the Cold War

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<sup>6</sup> Fraser, "Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy," 182.

<sup>7</sup> Wolpin, *America Insecure*, 182.

<sup>8</sup> League of Nations, *Statistical Yearbook*, 1920-1938.



escalated, so did arms transfers.<sup>9</sup> The American commitment to democracy paled as the country came to prefer “stable” right-wing dictatorships in the Third World over indigenous radicalism and what it perceived to be dangerous democratic (leftist) governments.<sup>10</sup> Allies in NATO were the most favored recipients of arms; and Japan and Germany also began to receive significant amounts in 1953 and 1955 respectively. Taiwan and South Korea got substantial amounts as well. At first, most arms transfers were in the form of grant aid, but after the oil embargo and the Yom Kippur War in 1973, most transfers were now in the form of sales.<sup>11</sup> Latin America received lesser, although significant, amounts especially in places such as Guatemala where Castillo Armas received about \$8 million in 1954.<sup>12</sup>

Only a small minority argues against the principle of arms transfers; indeed these transfers are an integral part of international affairs, and are widely recognized as being an essential element of foreign policy. Congressional concerns began to grow, however, as arms sales worldwide grew from \$3.8 billion in 1965 to more than \$20 billion by the time Carter took office, with the United States accounting for more than half of this.<sup>13</sup> By this time it was obvious that not only NATO allies were receiving significant amounts of arms from the US, but also other nations, often with unsavory reputations in the arena of human rights. Many in Congress and the public did not believe that this country should

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<sup>9</sup> Wolpin, *America Insecure*, 21-24 passim. See also Stephanie G. Neuman and Robert E. Harkavy, *Arms Transfers in the Modern World*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979); Basil Collier, *Arms and the Men* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1980.)

<sup>10</sup> Schmitz, *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Paul C. Warnke, with Edward C. Luck, “American Arms Transfers: Policy and Process in the Executive Branch, in Pierre, ed., *Arms Transfers and American Foreign Policy*, 195.

<sup>12</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, (hereinafter cited as SIPRI) Arms Transfers Database as of March 7, 2007 available at [www.SIPRI.org/arms/trad/at\\_data.html](http://www.SIPRI.org/arms/trad/at_data.html), accessed 7 March 2007. see also Nieto, *Masters of War*, 137-150; and Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984), 111-125.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew J. Pierre, “Introduction,” in Pierre, ed., *Arms Transfers and American Foreign Policy*, 11-13; Benson, “Turning the Supertanker,” 4.

be the world's leading arms merchant. Morality and ethics, a disbelief in the usefulness of force, and a desire that resources be directed toward domestic needs or humanitarian needs abroad all played a role in helping Carter to craft his arms restraint policy.<sup>14</sup>

There have been numerous attempts to rein in the global arms trade. The League of Nations tried to regulate the global arms trade under the authority of Article 8 of its covenant, which set the goal to reduce national armaments to the lowest possible point consistent with national safety. Article 23 (d) of the Covenant gave the League the authority to supervise the arms trade. Prior to World War One, the consensus was that private trade was untouchable; but the war triggered an outpouring of revulsion against the arms and the men who sold them. This presented an opportunity for arms restrictions to be part of the negotiations in Paris in 1919; and in September of that year representatives of the Powers met at St-Germain-en-Laye, a Paris suburb, to sign the Convention for the Control of the Trade in Arms and Ammunition. The League, fundamentally, tried to carry out the provisions of the Convention. Although the United States signed the document, it was never ratified. This was a pattern among most Great Powers. The League ultimately was not successful in its efforts, but it was not a complete failure either. From 1925 to 1938 it collected and documented a remarkable set of data on the arms trade, which made later work possible. Eventually most major producers became convinced that unfettered exports were not in their interests, and began to institute peacetime licensing. This is a forgotten success of the much maligned League of Nations.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Fraser, "Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy, 174-185; Moose, with Spiegel, "Congress and Arms Transfers," in Pierre, ed., *Arms Transfers and American Foreign Policy*," 235.

<sup>15</sup> David R. Stone, "Imperialism and Sovereignty," 214, 219, 230 See also Marks, *The Illusion of Peace*.

The idea of human rights, on the other hand, is new in history. By the middle of the twentieth century it had gained relevance and became one of the bases for the founding of the United Nations. Today the ideas are written into international conventions, protocols, covenants and are contained within the legal codes of numerous countries. They began to play a significant role in the US-Soviet relationship between 1968 and 1981, and this turned the Soviet-American competition in a new direction. Human rights speeded up the demise of détente and focused the world's attention on a new range of humanitarian concerns; and laid the groundwork for democratic reforms in the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation after the Soviet's abrupt collapse.<sup>16</sup> Carter pushed for ways to fit human rights into the foreign policy agenda of the United States by making this a priority in his arms transfer policy, his dialogue with the Soviet Union, and his attention to Third World issues. Few presidents have been as devoted to the goal that American foreign policy should reflect its highest values.

### *Costs Versus Benefits*

Governments can gain a number of benefits by transferring arms, including political, military, and economic advantages. There are also potential risks that must be weighed within those same categories, however. The political advantages which can accrue to the supplier include symbolic gestures of friendship, expanded influence, and outright leverage over the recipient. Military advantages can be direct, as when the supplier provides arms to allies, alongside which it may have to fight, or at least support, by reason of its own national interests. Arms have also been exchanged for basing rights

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<sup>16</sup>Edward Bailey Hodgman, "Détente and the Dissidents: Human Rights in United States-Soviet Relations, 1968-1980" (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 2003), 2-3; see also David P. Forsythe, "The United Nations and Human Rights, 1945-1985," *Political Science Quarterly* 100 (summer 1985): 249-269 for a discussion of the United Nation's role in promoting human rights.

and intelligence gathering rights, practices employed by both the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. There are also indirect military benefits such as conventional arms transfers as a non-proliferation strategy. Again, both the Soviet Union and the United States employed this tactic during the Cold War because they understood that it was in their interests to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. There are also economic benefits to supplier nations. First, they contribute to a favorable Current Account balance and provide a source of foreign exchange. Next, they help to relieve unemployment in regions that depend heavily on defense industries. Arms sales also help to reduce unit costs. Finally, they can be bartered directly for a needed commodity, such as oil.<sup>17</sup>

There are costs, however, to be paid for arms sales, and they can be numerous. Among those costs are political, sociological, military, economic, and the unintended transfer of technology to an enemy. There are several political costs that can be incurred. One of those is reverse leverage – that is, the recipient can become the tail that wags the dog. Paths of influence are two way streets, and the supplier can be held hostage if arms are used to procure important resources. Another potential cost is that the transfer of arms can spark a regional arms race. The infusion of large amounts of arms into an unstable region can cause reciprocal purchases by fearful neighbors, further destabilizing the region. There are also sociological costs. For example, large quantities of arms in a developing region give military power to both revolutionary forces and the forces of the status quo, often with devastating effects. Arms can also impede development in those regions as well, because money spent on weapons is money *not* being spent on

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<sup>17</sup> Geoffrey Kemp, with Steven Miller, “The Arms Transfer Phenomenon,” in Andrew J. Pierre, ed., *Arms Transfers and American Foreign Policy*, 46-65 passim; Wilson, “Turning the Supertanker, 5.

development projects. Furthermore, the supplier can often become identified with repressive regimes. Often, as weapons become more sophisticated, arms suppliers must also provide training to the recipient nations. Large numbers of people might go to the recipient state, and in Third World countries this expands opportunities for hostage-taking. There is, furthermore, always the possibility that the weapons will fall into an enemy's hands, giving it a great deal of information about the supplier's weapons systems. On the other hand, broad outlines of the technology and the general characteristics and capabilities of the weapons can be found in advertisements in numerous trade journals. There is also the possibility that the recipient will simply re-sell the weapons. Economic costs include the possibility that the arms industry could become dependent on external markets for survival. Small and medium size powers pursue aggressive campaigns to keep their nations competitive, and this contributes to the diffusion of conventional arms. Military costs include the possibility that arms transfers might involve the nation in war, or could seriously deplete the stocks of the supplier country, leaving it vulnerable. Or, the arms may be used against the supplier in a conflict.<sup>18</sup>

From time to time circumstances have combined with the perception of national interest that led to an escalation of arms sales, which in turn led to dangerous East-West confrontations. In the 1973 Yom Kippur War, for example, Moscow began to escalate deliveries of arms when hostilities broke out. The transfers continued, signaling that the Soviets were determined to support and encourage its client states in the Middle East.

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<sup>18</sup>Kemp with Miller, "The Arms Transfer Phenomenon," 65-86. See also Sverre Lodgaard and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., eds., *Arms and Technology Transfers: Security and Economic Considerations Among Importing and Exporting States*, United Nations (New York and Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research [UNIDR], 1995).

Israeli air strikes on Syrian ports damaged Soviet merchant ships, and the Kremlin deployed its navy along the air and sea routes between Eastern Europe and the Middle East. When the Israelis threatened major strategic defeats for the Soviet clients, the Russians made it clear that it was prepared to intervene with its own forces. The US, on the other hand, delayed arms transfers because of opposition from people such as Henry Kissinger who was Secretary of State at the time, and who saw an advantage in maintaining distance between the United States and Israel. Eventually, however, the country resorted to massive air lifts of arms, and in response to a perceived threat of Soviet intervention, put its forces on the highest alert. So, in 1973 the decision to sell arms in peacetime gradually led to a real risk of confrontation between the two Superpowers. Problems caused by arms transfers during a crisis are inextricably linked to peace time transfers.<sup>19</sup>

As one can see, there is truth on both sides of the argument about arms transfers, especially those which go to repressive regimes. This helped to set the stage in the Nixon-Ford years for tension between the executive and legislative branches of government over the control and direction of American foreign policy, part of which was a clash between power and principle. There was a strong reaction in Congress to the diplomatic style of Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, because it relied heavily on arms transfers as a major incentive in negotiations. Knowledge of the deals almost always came after the fact, with members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee often being the last to know, and much of the arms sales were to Persian Gulf nations, potential enemies of Israel. Over the strong objections of Gerald Ford, Congress enacted the International Security

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<sup>19</sup> Barry M. Blechman, Janne E. Nolan, and Alan Platt, "Pushing Arms," 138-141; for a discussion of United States arms transfers later to Israel, see Michael T. Klare and Dan Volman, "Pre-Emptive Peace": Arms Transfers and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," *MERIP Reports*, 0 (February 1978): 17-24.

Assistance and Arms Export Control Act of 1976.<sup>20</sup> This act is commonly known as the Arms Export Control Act (AECA), and was the basis for the policy that Carter inherited.

*The Arms Control Export Act*

The AECA contained a clear policy statement on arms transfers:

It shall be the policy of the United States to exert leadership in the world community to bring about arrangements for reducing the international trade in implements of war and to lessen the danger of outbreak of regional conflict and the burdens of armaments. United States programs for or procedures governing the export, sale, and grant of defense articles and defense services to foreign countries and international organizations shall be administered in a manner which will carry out this policy.<sup>21</sup>

The act places conditions on the use of defense articles and services it transfers to foreign governments. Violations of these conditions can lead to a suspension of the deliveries or defense contracts for various items. Section 3(a) of AECA sets the general standards for eligibility to receive these goods or services. Section 3(a)2 specifically provides that to be eligible, a

country or international organization shall have agreed not...to use or permit the use of [a defense] article or related training or other defense service for purposes other than those for which furnished, unless the consent of the President has first been obtained....

Section 3(c) further sets out the circumstances under which a nation could lose its

- US Foreign Military Financing;
- loan guarantees for purchases of American defense articles and services;
- rights to have previously purchased United States defense articles or services delivered;

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<sup>20</sup>Moose with Spiegel, "Congress and Arms Transfers" in Pierre, ed., *Arms Transfers and American Foreign Policy*, 228-260; see also Lewis Sorley, *Arms Transfers Under Nixon: A Policy Analysis* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983) which outlines the reasons for the huge increases in United States military sales.

<sup>21</sup>Cited in Moose with Spiegel in Pierre, ed., *Arms Transfers and American Foreign Policy*, " 249.

- rights to have previously made agreements for the sale of defense articles or services carried implemented if

Such country uses defense articles or defense services furnished under this Act or any predecessor Act, in substantial violation of *any agreement entered into pursuant to any such Act...* by using such articles or services for a purpose not authorized under section 4 or, if such agreement provides that such articles and services may only be used for purposes more limited than those authorized under section 4 for a purpose not authorized under such agreement.

The purposes for which military sales by the United States were authorized (Section 4 of the Arms Export Control Act) include

- “Internal security”
- “Legitimate self defense”
- Enabling the recipient to participate in “regional or collective arrangements or measures consistent with the Charter of the United Nations.”
- Enabling the recipient to participate in “collective measures requested by the United Nations for the purpose of maintaining or restoring international peace and security
- Enabling the foreign military forces “in less developed countries to construct public works and to engage in other activities helpful to the economic and social development of such friendly countries.”

The statute makes it clear that any sanctions that may be applied are for “substantial violations” of an agreement with the United States pursuant to the AECA, and not for a violation of the AECA itself or its predecessors. Also, terms such as “internal security”



and “legitimate self defense” are not defined. The president or the Congress must define the terms.<sup>22</sup>

AECA expanded Congressional oversight by (1) requiring that all non-NATO military sales of \$25 million or more be handled on a government to government basis, rather than through commercial channels, thus allowing Congress to veto the transaction; (2) calling on the President to submit to Congress a yearly justification for arms sales, country by country, including an arms control impact statement of these transfers; and (3) expanding reporting procedures, including data on agents fees and political contributions, on both government to government and commercial sales of arms.<sup>23</sup>

Congress also enacted a human rights policy into the AECA. Section 502B(2) states that

(2) It is further the policy of the United States that, except under circumstances specified in this section, no security assistance may be provided to any country the government of which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights.

(3) In furtherance of the foregoing policy the President is directed to formulate and conduct international security assistance programs of the United States in a manner which will promote and advance human rights and avoid identification of the United States, through such programs, with governments which deny to their people internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, in violation of international law or in contravention of the policy of the United States as expressed in this section or otherwise.

The act gave further directions about the responsibilities of the Secretary of State, with assistance of the Coordinator for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, for transmitting to Congress relevant information regarding the observance of and respect for internationally recognized human rights in each country that was proposed as a recipient

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<sup>22</sup> Richard F. Grimmett, “U.S. Defense Articles and Services Supplied to Foreign Recipients: Restrictions on Their Use,” updated 14 March 2005, Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress, received through the CRS Web 9 March 2007, 1-2.

<sup>23</sup> Warnke and Luck in Pierre, ed., *Arms Transfers and American Foreign Policy*, 215, 216.

of security assistance. It also elaborated the rights of Congress in requesting and receiving information in a timely manner. "Gross violations of internationally recognized human rights include torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, prolonged detention without charges and trial, and other flagrant denial of the right to life, liberty, or the security of the person."<sup>24</sup> One thing that influenced the inclusion of a human rights provision into AECA was that in 1976 both the International Covenant on Economic and Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights went into force, albeit without ratification. President Carter submitted them to the Senate, for advice and consent.<sup>25</sup>

#### THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S POLICIES

Experts disagree on whether arms transfer policy was influenced more by the "conservative, status quo oriented, resistant to change" bureaucracies, which have their own agendas;<sup>26</sup> or by men such as Paul Warnke, Cyrus Vance, and other "arms controllers" who helped to at least partially implement arms restraints. However, the unrelenting propaganda from the political right gradually was successful in convincing both elite and mass opinion that arms restraints equated to the erosion of Western influence, leaving the Soviets as the net winner.<sup>27</sup> The neoconservatives in general saw détente as a one-way street, with the Soviet Union making all the gains, and argued that authoritarian, right-wing dictatorships were capable of evolving into democratic regimes,

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<sup>24</sup> U.S. Statutes at Large 90 (1976): 729; for a discussion on the origins of the term "consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights," see Fraser, "Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy," 174-185.

<sup>25</sup> Fraser, "Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy," 175.

<sup>26</sup> Spear, *Carter and Arms Sales*, 21.

<sup>27</sup> Wolpin, *America Insecure*, 33.

while totalitarian (left wing) regimes were hostile to American interests. They were “permanent” dictatorships that would never evolve into democracies.<sup>28</sup>

In the meantime, the NSC was unanimous in its desire to get arms sales under control, and was determined to place tighter restraints on future commitments. This correlated with Brzezinski’s position of “deep cuts” in strategic weapons in the SALT II negotiations with the Soviet Union.<sup>29</sup> Vance was assigned the job of implementing the arms transfer policy, and he told reporters that the nation was committed to the basic principle of finding ways to reduce the sales. Ultimately, the country would have to convince other nations to stop selling arms on a grand scale, but as the “largest seller of arms” it had “a particular responsibility to first put our own house in order.”<sup>30</sup> Vance put Leslie Gelb, Director of the State Department’s Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs, in charge of developing a set of policy options for the president. Gelb started by studying the issues raised by the tremendous growth in military sales. Most of the arms were now going to Third World countries, especially those oil rich countries of the Middle East, but a large portion was also going to debt-ridden countries in regions such as Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the arms were now much more sophisticated. For example, Iran before 1964 had no guided missiles or supersonic aircraft, but was now getting various types of missiles and combat airplanes. Similar systems were being sold elsewhere as well, thus assuring that conflicts would be increasingly violent.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Schmitz, *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships*, 194.

<sup>29</sup> See Garrison, “Grading Foreign Policy Alternatives in the Inner Circle,” 775-807.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in *New York Times*, January 25, 1977 and text released by State Department January 31, 1977.

<sup>31</sup> SIPRI, *Arms Trade Registers*, Stockholm, 1975; Michael Klare, “Carter’s Arms Sales Policies,” 5; Benson, “Turning the Supertanker,” 6.

In addition to selling arms, the United States was also exporting technical expertise through “co-production” joint ventures which involved both America and foreign businesses in the manufacture of a common item; or licensing measures in which a foreign producer gets the blueprints to produce an American-designed weapon. Many experts regard technology transfers such as this to be highly dangerous in the long run because they increase the number of arms producers and make the weapons more readily available; and also complicate negotiations on conventional arms restraints. The United States also sells its military skills abroad, providing training and maintenance in the weapons systems. Furthermore, there was a growing involvement of American technicians working on military-related projects in Iran and Saudi Arabia, numbering approximately 25,000 at that time. Arms manufacturers also engage in various activities to promote their products, including paying enormous bribes to sales agents and foreign countries. Other problems involve the sale of police-type equipment such as handguns, ammunition, tear gas, grenades, and armored cars to foreign police agencies in some of the most repressive regimes on the globe – including Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Haiti, Uruguay, Iran, Indonesia, South Korea, and the Philippines.<sup>32</sup>

At first, observers in Washington predicted that the Administration would impose a permanent ceiling on arms exports which would be lower than the \$10 billion which was estimated for Fiscal Year (FY) 1977. They also believed that it would roll back the export of high technology arms. As much as Carter the man might wish to disarm the world, he was also a practical person; and as he and Vance began to discuss the issues

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<sup>32</sup> U.S. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Military Sales to Iran*, Staff Report, 94<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2d Session, 1976, vii; Klare “Carter’s Arms Sales Policies,” 5, 6.

with the “conservative, status-quo oriented, resistant to change”<sup>33</sup> bureaucracies, both inside and outside of government, they talked about taking a “balanced” approach. They did not believe that all arms sales were intrinsically bad, and there were valid political, military, and economic considerations. Certain regional “deputies” needed arms to carry out the job of protecting American interests under the Nixon Doctrine; namely Third World countries where direct military intervention was not acceptable. Also, arms sales helped the Current Account move back towards balance and could make the manufacture of weapons cheaper. Plus, they enriched the various American firms, which profited enormously.<sup>34</sup>

Many were still alarmed that Carter, a president who had deliberately distanced himself from the foreign policy machinations of the previous administrations, would betray the national interest with any new policy on arms transfers. However, in late April 1977, Carter agreed to the sale of five AWACS radar surveillance planes to Iran. During his first trip abroad as president two weeks later, Carter assured NATO allies that they would be exempt from any new restrictions on military sales; and at the same time, he affirmed that “special treatment” would continue to be given to Israeli arms requests.<sup>35</sup>

Carter officially articulated a set of controls which were applicable to all transfers except those countries the United States had major defense treaties with (NATO, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand) and he went on to say that the nation would honor its “historic responsibilities to assure the security of the State of Israel.” The controls would

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<sup>33</sup> Spear, *Carter and Arms Transfers*, 21.

<sup>34</sup> Klare, “Carter’s Arms Sales Policies,” 7, and Michael T. Klare, “The Political Economy of Arms Sales,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, (November 1976): 10-18. Klare was a consistent critic of Carter’s policy.

<sup>35</sup> John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. “Conventional Arms Transfer Policy Statement by the President, May 19, 1977.” Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted), Gerhard Peters (database). Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=7530>. Accessed 16 March 2007.

be binding unless “extraordinary circumstances” made a Presidential exception necessary, or where he determined that friendly nations needed advanced weaponry in order to offset quantitative or other disadvantages that could change a regional balance of power. He promised that

1. The dollar volume (in constant FY 1976 dollars) of new commitments under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and Military Assistance Programs (MAP) for weapons in FY1978 will be less than FY 1977. Services were not covered, nor were commercial sales.
2. The United States would not be the first supplier to introduce advanced weapons systems into a region, which would create a new or significantly higher combat capability. In order to remove the incentive to promote foreign sales to lower unit costs to the US, no commitment for sale or co-production of such weapons can be made until they are operationally deployed with American forces.
3. Significant modification of advanced weapons systems solely for the purpose of export would not be permitted
4. Co-production agreements for significant weapons, equipment, and major components would be prohibited. A limited group of items would be considered for these co-production arrangements, but with restrictions on Third World countries.
5. In addition to existing requirements of the law, the United States may stipulate that it would not entertain any requests for retransfers.
6. State Department approval would be needed for actions by agents of the United States or private firms which might promote the sale of arms abroad. In addition,

American embassies and military representatives abroad would not promote the sale of arms.

Carter also promised that in formulating security assistance programs the United States would continue to promote and advance respect for human rights in the recipient nations. It would also assess the economic impact of arms transfers to lesser developed countries. He recognized that to reduce the amount of arms transfers worldwide, America needed to gain multilateral cooperation; but since the United States was the world's leader in arms trafficking, it should set the example.

The economic impact of arms transfers to developing nations would also be assessed. He said that henceforth the United States would view arms transfers as an *exceptional* foreign policy tool, used only when it could be clearly demonstrated that such transfers were in American national security interests. He added that the country "would continue to utilize arms transfers to promote our security and the security of our close friends. But in the future the burden of persuasion will be on those who favor a particular arms sale, rather than those who oppose it."<sup>36</sup>

Contrary to the criticism of the neoconservatives, Carter did not endanger the national security by radically reducing arms exports. For FY 1976-78, the exempted countries accounted for 35 percent of arms exports under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program. Carter's proposals only applied to 56 percent of the market if other countries the country had "major defense treaties" with (South Korea, Taiwan, Spain, and the Philippines) were included. Allies were not going to be left high and dry. Services, which were also not included in the restraints, constituted about 40 percent of all Foreign Military Sales (FMS) contracts, and this, plus the exclusion of commercial sales, limited

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. .

the controls to about 35 percent of all military exports. So, any accusations that Carter was selling out the national interests were not well founded. Plus, Carter continued to supply high-tech weapons to Israel, and had, as stated earlier, also approved the sale of AWACS to Iran, although he later removed this from the table. Industry sources concluded that the purpose of that sale was to bring down unit costs on the AWACS program since the Pentagon faced a relatively stingy Congress. He also approved the sale of 60 McDonnell-Douglas F-15 *Eagle* jet fighters to Saudi Arabia, an airplane far more advanced than any that were currently on the Arabian Peninsula. Co-production projects also increased because of the exemptions. This was mainly due to Carter's desire to standardize NATO weapons. Interoperability among the Allies was essential. The requirement that the State Department approve weapons sales at the policy level was not particularly intrusive, since American arms producers have routinely sought informal approval prior to initiating serious arms transfer talks with foreign governments. Additionally, the ban on promotional activities did not stop the Air Force from demonstrating American airplanes at the Paris Air Show in 1977, held two weeks after Carter's new guidelines were released.<sup>37</sup> Many inside and outside of Congress resented the fact that the United States was not allowed to demonstrate its technological capabilities at these shows, and the prohibition on these types of events was later reviewed.

On the other side of the debate, Carter was criticized for not doing enough to limit arms transfers. What he *did* do was to impose a dollar ceiling. In fiscal 1978 this was \$8.551 billion – an eight percent reduction from fiscal 1977 arms sales total. The final

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<sup>37</sup> Richard Burt, "Carter Plans 2d Cut in Arms Sales; Iranian Decision Is a Help," *New York Times* 26 November 1978; Klare, "Carter's Arms Sales Policies: Business as Usual," 7, 8.



year-end total of ceiling-related transfers was \$8.538 billion. A further eight percent reduction was anticipated for 1979. Critics pointed out that ceilings derived mathematically as a percentage of past activity ignore present military requirements and broad national security interests. A counter argument is that, at least initially, a ceiling is needed in order to make the people managing the decision making machinery think in different ways, reflecting the policy shift that placed the burden of persuasion from the opposers to the proposers. Furthermore, ample attention had been paid to security interests by exempting NATO, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand from the ceiling. The ceilings cannot go down indefinitely, in any case, without fundamental political change or disarmament arrangements. The ceiling forced the arms transfer community into long-range planning. The Foreign Assistance Act required the executive branch to inform Congress by November 15 of each year of all arms transfers it “considers eligible” for submission to Congress during the fiscal year. Bookkeeping also had to be tightened up – it became essential to keep track of each major sale proposal in detail. The ceiling also acted as a filter, weeding out questionable requests at the beginning of the process. Finally, the ceiling would provide evidence that the country was serious about arms transfer restraints, which was a necessary, although not sufficient, condition to demonstrate the credibility of the policy.

Qualitative elements of the policy were, arguably, more important than the money. These controls center on what and how the nation sells and to which countries. These involve sophisticated and often subjective judgments about specific weapons and

countries, and they are not always widely publicized, especially if a request is turned down.<sup>38</sup>

### *Conventional Arms Transfer Agreements*

As Carter laid out his policy on arms transfers, it was agreed that other large supplier countries would be approached and asked to reduce their own transfers, because no unilateral policy of restraint could succeed for long without some reining in of other major exporters. Vice President Fritz Mondale visited major European capitals to sound out the allies, and the reaction varied from mild interest to outright skepticism. They consistently insisted that it was essential to engage the Soviet Union in the discussions. The administration then began to focus exclusively on the Soviet Union. When Carter took office, the conventional wisdom was that the Soviets would never discuss restraints on arms transfers. However, when addressing the 16<sup>th</sup> Congress of Trade Unions, Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev observed that the problem of international trafficking in arms merited an exchange of views. When Vance visited Moscow in March 1977 he succeeded in setting up a bi-lateral working group on arms transfers (although his suggestions on SALT II were rejected). Leslie Gelb led the American group and the two sides met four times beginning in December 1977 until the collapse of the talks a year later. By the end of the second round of talks, those involved thought that substantive progress was possible. The United States thought that if there were to be concrete results the two sides should also discuss transfers to specific regions as soon as possible. This would provide a way to regulate Soviet behavior in the Third World. The Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) argued for concentrating on global restrictions of certain weapons. At the third meeting a framework was agreed to for drawing up general

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<sup>38</sup> Benson, "Turning the Supertanker," 9-13.

principles of mutual restraint and for exchanging views on sales to various regions. While preparing for the fourth round of talks which would be held in Mexico City in December 1978, the State Department proposed that the discussions begin with two regions: Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, neither of which received substantial amounts of arms. The Soviets accepted the American proposal but later added their own regions: West Asia and East Asia. Although never specified officially, the United States believed that West Asia included Iran and East Asia included China. Previously the Soviets had suggested that one of the principles should be to prohibit transfers to states bordering one of the suppliers and another banning them to states that refused to engage in disarmament talks. These two principles were aimed at Beijing and were rejected by the United States.<sup>39</sup> Agreement was reached, however, on the need for technical criteria defining the permissible levels and types of weapons, as well as the need for legal guidelines. Most importantly, the Soviets accepted the premise that discussions should include arms transfers to particular regions. They even accepted the idea of interim regional agreements, which could consist of lists of specific weapons that would not be sold. This indicated Soviet seriousness.<sup>40</sup>

However, deep objections of the National Security Council to even talking about East or West Asia with the Soviets emerged just before the Mexico City meeting. At a Cabinet meeting, Gelb and Brzezinski disagreed sharply over the issue. Although Gelb evidently did not support the idea of discussing China, he is said to have argued that it would not hurt to hear what the Soviets had to say about Iran and South Korea. Brzezinski attacked the CAT talks, especially the proposed discussions on East and West

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<sup>39</sup> Andrew J. Pierre, *The Global Politics of Arms Sales*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 285-288.

<sup>40</sup> Blechman, Nolan, and Platt, "Pushing Arms," 146.

Asia. Vance was not present at the meeting, which allowed Brzezinski to get the upper hand in the argument. Prior to the third round, Carter agreed to a discussion of regions, but now he reversed course, siding with Brzezinski. Later, some people involved believed that Brzezinski opposed the entire notion of talking with the SU, but did not weigh in until a very late date. The American delegation to Mexico City was instructed to walk out of the talks if the Soviets brought up arms transfer restraints to West and East Asia. The cable traffic was heavy between the delegation and Washington, and was “dripping with venom.” At one point Gelb was ordered back to Washington, but this was then rescinded.<sup>41</sup>

The Soviets were angry at the unwillingness of the Americans to even hear what they had to say, and refused to limit the agenda to the American-proposed regions of Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. The Soviet delegation, led by Lev Mendelevich, then suggested that the two sides talk about naval forces in the Indian Ocean, but Gelb was instructed to listen only and not engage in substantive discussions. In another communication Gelb was instructed not to discuss the Indian Ocean and to conclude the session. Although the White House officials complained privately that Gelb tried to exceed his negotiating instructions, this was strongly denied by Vance in a statement to the *Washington Post*. The internal bureaucratic squabble in Washington probably reflected a more fundamental lack of agreement on the purposes and limitations of the CAT talks; and this, in turn, was related to a lack of consensus regarding United States policy towards the Soviet Union, especially in the realm of the Third World. If the European allies had not been let off the hook, so to speak, and had also engaged in the

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<sup>41</sup>“Feud in Administration Said to Endanger Talks on Arms Sales Pact,” *New York Times*, December 20, 1978; “Policy Shift Puts Arms Sales Talks in Doubt,” *Washington Post*, December 19, 1978; see also Barry M. Blechman, Janne E. Nolan, and Alan Platt, “Pushing Arms,” 138-154.

talks, the process might have been less vulnerable to Washington's bureaucratic arguments.<sup>42</sup> There is evidence that the Americans and Soviets can exercise mutual restraints. Throughout the Vietnam War, for example, the two rivals avoided direct confrontation. The United States did not interdict the military supplies to North Vietnam, and avoided targets that would endanger Soviet nationals (until near the end of the war). The Soviets, for their part, did not supply certain weapons to North Vietnam that might have threatened American naval vessels operating in the Gulf of Tonkin. In East Asia as well, neither side made certain types of military equipment available to their allies that they had already transferred to other regions.<sup>43</sup>

#### *Human Rights and Security Assistance*

Carter directly tied security assistance with efforts to "promote and advance respect for human rights in recipient countries."<sup>44</sup> States have defined certain basic freedoms under the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the UN Covenants, the European and Inter-American Conventions, and the Helsinki accords, and have agreed to respect these rights of people within their jurisdiction.<sup>45</sup> Much of the military, either in grants or sales of arms, goes to governments viewed as repressive by the international community. This aid helps to sustain these governments, and America is often viewed as approving of the gross human rights violations, in spite of section 502B(a)(2) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.

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<sup>42</sup> "Feud In Administration Said to Endanger Talks on Arms Sales Pact," *New York Times* 20 December 1978; Pierre, *The Global Politics of Arms Sales*, 289-290.

<sup>43</sup> Blechman, Nolan, and Platt, "Pushing Arms," 141.

<sup>44</sup> Conventional Arms Transfer Policy Statement by the President, May 19, 1977. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United State: Jimmy Carter*, vol. 1, (Washington: Federal Register Division, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, 1977).

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, R. Lillich and F. Newman, *International Human Rights: Problems of Law and Policy* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1979); Louis B. Sohn and Thomas Buergenthal, eds., *International Protection of Human Rights* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1973).

However, Carter did much more than his predecessors to implement section 502B, while trying to act in the national interest. Human rights got a reasonable hearing in most of the stages of the process. Sales of new weapons to eight Latin American countries dried up, as did military assistance.<sup>46</sup> Withholding weapons based on human rights records was a radical departure from the past, in spite of the fact that only a few countries were totally cut off. So, compared to previous administrations Carter's policy was highly successful. While doing more than his predecessors or successors, he was not radical, nor did he shift the "entire basis of foreign policy from power to principle."<sup>47</sup>

Because it was adhered to more closely, the implementation of 502B during the Carter years generated intense bureaucratic warfare between the career Foreign Service which had the responsibility of day-to-day management of foreign relations, and a newly created Department of State Bureau of Human Rights, created by Congress and staffed (to a great degree) by outsiders. This new Assistant Secretary of State had responsibility for participating in decisions on security assistance. The House International Relations Committee hinted that they would closely watch the actions of the new administration in implementing the human rights provisions of 502B.<sup>48</sup> Again, Carter was besieged by the political right that he was selling out the national interests in exchange for human rights, and by the left that he did not go far enough in protecting them. An indication that

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<sup>46</sup> David L. Cingranelli and Thomas E. Pasquarello, "Human Rights Practices and the Distribution of U.S. Foreign Aid to Latin American Countries," *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (August 1985): 539-563.

<sup>47</sup> This is an almost casual observation by John Lewis Gaddis in his introduction to "The Unexpected Ronald Reagan," in *The United States and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), ch. 7; see also Michael Stohl, David Carleton, and Steven E. Johnson, "Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Assistance from Nixon to Carter," *Journal of Peace Research* 21 (September 1984): 215-226 which finds no statistical difference between Nixon's and Carter's policies; see also William F. Buckley, Jr., "Human Rights and Foreign Policy: A Proposal," *Foreign Affairs* (spring 1980): available at [www.foreignaffairs.org](http://www.foreignaffairs.org), accessed 31 March 2006.

<sup>48</sup> U.S. Congress. House. "Foreign Assistance Legislation for Fiscal Year 1978 Part I, *Hearings Before the House Committee on International Relations*, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. (1977). (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1977). See remarks by Rep. Fraser, Harrington, 27 and 29.

Congress felt that the Carter Administration did not go far enough in its first year to protect rights was that in 1978 Congress again strengthened 502B by deleting “it is the policy of the United States” language from subsection (a)(2), and directly stated that, absent “extraordinary circumstances...no security assistance may be provided to any country, the government of which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights.”<sup>49</sup> This made section 502B(a)(2) a legally binding requirement of security assistance.<sup>50</sup> Many Congressmen, especially those on the House International Relations Committee, were concerned over support and spare parts deliveries to certain countries, such as South Korea and the Philippines, while others were distressed over the number of exceptions for “extraordinary circumstances.”<sup>51</sup> Congress’ concern was nothing new. Beginning in 1974 Congress began to legislate against giving military aid and selling arms to certain designated countries. It named, at different times, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Paraguay, the Philippines, South Korea, Uruguay, and Zaire. The ban was effective for only a short time and mostly mentioned military aid. In some cases it prohibited arms sales as well, for an indefinite duration. These bans seemed to indicate that Congress found the executive branch derelict in applying Section 502B to governments engaged in “gross violations” and that “extraordinary circumstances” did not apply. Congress basically put

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<sup>49</sup> U.S. Code, reprinted in *Congressional and Administrative News*, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess., v. 3 “Legislative History,” (St. Paul, MN.: West Publishing Co., 1978-80), 1868, 1874; for a critique of Carter’s policies, as well as those of other presidents regarding human rights, see David P. Forsythe, “Human Rights in U.S. Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect,” *Political Science Quarterly* 105, autumn 1990): 435-454.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen B. Cohen, “Conditioning U.S. Security Assistance on Human Rights Practices,” *The American Journal of International Law* 76 (April 1982): 254.

<sup>51</sup> See U.S. Congress. House. “Human Rights in the Philippines, Recent Developments: Hearings Before the Subcomm. On International Organizations of the House Comm. On International Relations,” 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d Sess. (1978).

the executive branch on notice – apply section 502B or face further legislation.<sup>52</sup> The Carter administration did this more and better than its predecessors, causing a great deal of bickering among the entrenched interests.

In spite of the support of high government officials, the State Department career bureaucracy dragged its feet on implementation of 502B, and warfare ensued between the Foreign Service and the newly established Assistant Secretary for Human Rights, Patricia M. Derian, an outsider who was strongly committed to human rights and who wanted implementation. The Foreign Service views itself as the body that maintains cordial relations with foreign countries, and military assistance and arms sales provide a necessary and convenient vehicle for this maintenance. If aid is refused and the other government suspects it is because a judgment has been passed that it has mistreated its own citizens, the relationship becomes more difficult to preserve. Keeping other governments happy is the goal. Other countries are thought of as “clients” because the Foreign Service identifies with their interests, rather than as states to be dealt with in accordance with the national interests of the US. The time horizon is short for the career bureaucrat. They typically serve in a particular location for three years and are then transferred to another spot. Because of this, long-term disadvantages of dispensing military aid are often not considered. The goal is immediate: please the client. The regional bureaus consistently opposed tying military assistance to human rights both before and during the Carter administration. They argued at first that 502B was not legally binding; then when it became legally binding they argued that it was only one of several factors to be considered in decisions on arms transfers. They also distorted or

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<sup>52</sup> Cohen, “Conditioning U.S. Security Assistance on Human Rights Practices,” 256; see also John M. Howell, “Socioeconomic Dilemmas of U.S. Human Rights Policy,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 3 (February 1981): 78-92.



underreported information about human rights abuses, and exaggerated positive signs. In 1978, for example, the Bureau for the Near East reported that the Shah of Iran was embarking on a major liberalization program, ending torture, releasing political prisoners, and giving political authority to an elected parliament. It did not report that most Iranians considered the whole thing a sham or that there were credible reports that torture was still going on and that elections were rigged. Finally, the regional bureaus overstated United States interests at stake in some cases, claiming, for example, that unless military aid to the Philippines was tripled, the country could lose its bases there. There were few exceptions to these practices<sup>53</sup>

Because of the “conservative, slow to change” career bureaucracy at the regional level, implementation of 502B during the Carter administration depended heavily at first on Patricia Derian’s Bureau of Human Rights, and it began to function as a counterweight to the clientism. It insisted that 502B had to be satisfied before military aid could be granted, and it developed independent sources of information about human rights in various states. When Congress elevated the Coordinator of the Bureau to an Assistant Secretary of State, it enumerated a specific list of legislated responsibilities. Because of 502B the human rights office projected itself into all decisions on security assistance. When there was disagreement with the regional offices, it insisted that a decision paper (known as an action memorandum) be sent to the Secretary of State for resolution. During the first months of the Carter administration arms transfers were continuously an issue between Derian and the regional offices, and were mediated

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<sup>53</sup> Stephen B. Cohen, “Conditioning U.S. Security Assistance on Human Rights Practices,” 260 and *Washington Post* 20 September 1980.

through the action memorandum. A number of political compromises were the result, with the administration finding a middle way between power and principle.<sup>54</sup>

Although many accuse the Carter administration of being aggressive and single minded in the area of human rights,<sup>55</sup> this reflects as much the rhetoric of high government officials, including Carter, as it does the reality. However, when examining decisions under 502B a more balanced picture emerges. Relatively few governments were found to be engaging in gross human rights violations, and security assistance was cut off for only a few, and the law applied to only a few.<sup>56</sup> That is not to say that every country not “cut off” continued to receive all the arms it wanted; and arms transfers were reduced to various states. Carter did do much more than his predecessors to implement section 502B. Human rights were given a hearing at nearly all stages of the process of providing military assistance, and the Bureau on Human Rights had reasonable opportunities to make its views known. On the other hand, the policy was never to determine formally, even in a classified decision, that a country was engaged in gross violations, because of the fear of leaks which would, in turn, insult the named country. Also, once identified, public pressure would make it difficult to change the finding even if the country improved its record. Furthermore, conservative, defense industry allies did not want military ties cut. Administration officials repeatedly refused Congress’s requests for a list of governments suspected of engaging in gross abuses because of the negative publicity it would generate; and finally, when making 502B legally binding,

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<sup>54</sup> Cohen, “Conditioning U.S. Security Assistance on Human Rights Practices,” 263. See also Morton Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1974 and 2006) for a discussion on foreign policy decision making and the role of the bureaucracies.

<sup>55</sup> Vita Bite, “Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy,” Issue Brief Number IB81 125, Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, Major Issues System, Aug. 19, 1981 updated Nov. 24, 1982, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Congressional Research Service “Human Rights Study,” Senate Foreign Relations Comm., 96<sup>th</sup> Cong. 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1979, 84-85.

Congress acquiesced to the practice of not making such a list public.<sup>57</sup> Cyrus Vance publicly avoided detailed explanations for the decisions made on security assistance, but simply said whether the request was approved or disapproved.<sup>58</sup>

In its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices submitted to the House Committee on International Relations, and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1978, the State Department consistently used language such as “nor is there reliable evidence...;” “their authenticity [the rumors of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment] has never been substantiated.” Some critics of the administration accuse it of laxness because of these phrases, but Amnesty International’s reports were routinely reviewed; and even when it reported that mass torture and executions had dropped significantly in some countries, the United States still did not restore security assistance.<sup>59</sup>

The issue of security assistance never arose with respect to many countries that appeared to engage in gross violations of human rights; nor was it supposed to. Communist countries and Soviet client states were barred from receiving aid for reasons of national security. This left about 70 countries that were seriously considered for arms sales and other military aid. The meaning of “gross violations” was narrowly interpreted and ultimately only about 12 of the 70 fell into the category of gross, consistent violations of human rights. Donald Fraser, representative from Minnesota’s Fifth District, the statute’s sponsor, favored a narrow interpretation of 502B, and the legislative history supports this view. The Carter administration followed Fraser’s interpretation. Some in the government assumed a basic conflict between pursuing national self interest and

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<sup>57</sup> U.S. Code, *Congressional and Administrative News*, 95<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess., 1978.

<sup>58</sup> Cohen, “Conditioning U.S. Security Assistance on Human Rights Practices,” 266.

<sup>59</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, submitted to the House Committee on International Relations and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 5 February 1978, 3, see Guatemala, 165-167.

morality – power and principle. Those who drafted section 502B obviously did not see a conflict.<sup>60</sup> The Fraser subcommittee report stated that “consideration for human rights in foreign policy is both morally imperative and practically necessary. Providing security assistance was to be decided “on all the facts,” in the national interest.<sup>61</sup> Sometimes this assistance was provided to gross violators if the administration believed that it might lead to an improvement in a country’s human rights, in spite of the fact that these exceptions were not in the law.<sup>62</sup>

The violations were limited to arbitrary imprisonment, torture, or summary execution of large numbers of its own people. Basic civil and political liberties were not included. The term “gross” was usually interpreted to mean that violations had to be significant in their impact; and “consistent pattern” was interpreted to mean that abuses had to be significant in number and recurrent. If steps were taken to stop some of the abuses, the Carter administration occasionally decided that the “pattern” was not “consistent” The fourth element, that the government was responsible for the abuses, ceased to be an issue if the other criteria were met. For example, in 1980 the State Department, now led by Edmund Muskie, argued that the government of El Salvador did not engage in gross abuses committed by the military, because of evidence that the government may not have approved.<sup>63</sup>

Although a specific list of gross violators was never drawn up, one can be inferred from the decisions that Vance or, later, Edmund Muskie made. Of the 70 or so countries

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<sup>60</sup> Cohen, “Conditioning U.S. Security Assistance on Human Rights Practices,” 270-71.

<sup>61</sup> U.S. Congress. House. “Human Rights in the World Community: A Call for U.S. Leadership,” House Subcommittee on International Organizations and Movement, 93d Cong., 2d Sess., 1977, 9-11. (Often referred to as the Fraser Report.)

<sup>62</sup> Cohen, “Conditioning U.S. Security Assistance on Human Rights Practices,” 272.

<sup>63</sup> Cingranelli and Pasquarello, “Human Rights Practices and the Distribution of U.S. Foreign Aid to Latin American Countries,” 539-563.; Cohen, “Conditioning U.S. Security Assistance on Human Rights Practices,” 266-268.

considered for military aid and arms sales, a significant number were functioning democracies with good records on human rights. These included countries such as the governments of Western Europe, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and some Third World countries such as Botswana, Colombia, and Kenya. A second category included authoritarian governments, such as Singapore, Morocco, and Taiwan that sometimes engaged in abuses, but not often enough to raise concerns about a “consistent pattern.” The third category consisted of governments which consistently used torture, arbitrary imprisonment, or summary execution on a large scale. This list would include Argentina, Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Uruguay, the Philippines, South Korea, Iran, and Zaire. Countries rotated on and off as circumstances changed. Much of the research on the distribution of foreign assistance to Latin America has concluded that the United States rewards dictators who were abusers of human rights and punish those who champion them, although the literature employing statistical measures are confusing on this point. Carter managed to begin a change in these trends; and there is some evidence that American human rights policy was used to punish abusers, rather than reward protectors.<sup>64</sup>

The Carter administration always carefully considered whether other United States interests might require continuation of military assistance. A simple desire for “cordial relations” was not enough; however; if a substantial American interest were cited, the “extraordinary circumstances” clause could be invoked. Carter made use of the clause when he felt it was in the national interest to do so. Because of this, the number of countries which had their aid *cut off* was only eight, all in Latin America – Argentina, Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Uruguay. None

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<sup>64</sup> Cohen, “Conditioning U.S. Security Assistance on Human Rights Practices,” 269.

supplied a critical resource, acted as a surrogate defender of United States interests, or had a border with the Soviet Union.

Latin America has been viewed as a testing ground for American arms policies, helping policymakers to appreciate the shifts that have occurred and how effective the policies were in achieving their goals. Latin American sales declined precipitously under Carter, but rose again sharply under Ronald Reagan, his successor in the White House. Carter emphasized restraint in its arms exports the region, discouraging the sale of high-tech items, and Congress imposed a variety of restrictions on the sale to military regimes.<sup>65</sup> Vance announced that no military aid would go to Ethiopia or Uruguay for FY 1978, and that Argentina's aid would decline by 50%. While the administration did propose assistance for some governments that appeared to be engaging in gross violations, most of the funds for the Latin American countries were not distributed. Beginning in FY 1979 and continuing through FY 1981 essentially no military aid was given to countries on the implied hit list. Exceptions to the rule sometimes occurred, such as aid to Haiti for the purchase of air-sea rescue equipment. Carter did not necessarily end all sales of defense equipment when a government engaged in gross violations. New weapons were consistently withheld, but safety related items, such as ambulance aircraft and air-sea rescue equipment, were almost never refused. Spare parts and support equipment were also approved for sale in certain cases. Although these sales are contrary to the literal interpretation of 502B, the administration argued they were legal according to the underlying purpose of the statute – the protection of human rights. The inducement reasoning (that is, the carrot approach as a way to encourage the

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<sup>65</sup> Michael T. Klare, *American Arms Supermarket*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 77-79.

protection of human rights) was used to justify selling small amounts of spare parts and support items to Argentina, El Salvador, Guatemala, Paraguay, and Uruguay. There is no clear evidence that this lessened the abuses, but it probably did not lead to an increase because they involved relatively small dollar amounts. The exception was Argentina, considered to be one of the worst non-Communist violators; and, while the dollar value of the sales in 1978 was higher than in any previous year, the trend indicator value was not.<sup>66</sup> Search and rescue as well as safety equipment were no doubt still being sold, but not necessarily new weapons.

When a substantial national interest was found to exist, the administration, as had others before it, assumed that arms transfers would help to secure that interest.<sup>67</sup> This worked much of the time, but not always. The most stunning miscalculation concerned Iran. In 1977 and 1978, while rejecting the open ended sale of arms to the shah that the Nixon-Kissinger administration had made, the country still sold significant amounts of sophisticated weapons. The Iranian people grew to believe that their oil wealth was being squandered to benefit American defense companies, and this increased their anti-Americanism.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Conventional Arms Transfer policy of the Carter administration *slowed down* the extraordinary growth in the sale of weapons. According to Pierre, total American arms sales, including government to government as well as commercial sales, rose from \$12.8 billion in 1977 to \$17.1 billion in 1980. This is an increase of \$4.3 billion. By the end of 1979 there was a large backlog of unfilled order totaling \$43.5 billion. The

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<sup>66</sup> Cohen, "Conditioning U.S. Security Assistance on Human Rights Practices," 276.

<sup>67</sup> See Neuman and Harkavy, *Arms Transfers in the Modern World*, especially William H. Lewis, "Political Influence: The Diminished Capacity, 184-199.

backlog Carter inherited was \$27 billion. This was due in large part because the ceiling on the dollar amount of arms sales imposed for FY1978, did not apply to NATO allies, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, where much of the growth occurred. Nor did it apply to commercial sales, which are controlled by other regulations.<sup>68</sup> Also, arms transfers to Iran stopped immediately after the seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran in 1979, and did not begin again until the Reagan administration took office.<sup>69</sup> Brzezinski cites a relatively small increase in sales to the Third World – from \$6.9 billion to \$7.9 billion between 1977 and 1980. He also points out that European allies jumped into the breach, with France, West Germany, the U.K. and Italy collectively being responsible for a 78 percent increase in transfers – from \$6.9 billion to \$12.3 billion in 1980. Carter’s belief that other Western nations would follow the United States example proved to be unfounded. The Soviet Union’s increase was 55 percent during the Carter years – from \$9.6 billion in 1977 to \$14.9 in 1980.<sup>70</sup> Since allies were generally exempt under the AECA, Brzezinski’s numbers might be of more interest in evaluating the policy of the administration. The trend indicator values on actual deliveries of major conventional weapons in the SIPRI Arms Transfers database *decreased* from 14,089 in 1977 to 9,752 in 1980.<sup>71</sup> Carter also created an institutional framework which established a rigorous review of significant proposed commercial sales before formal letters of agreement were sent to recipient countries. He did not automatically end all military assistance when a

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<sup>68</sup> Pierre, *The Global Politics of Arms Sales*, 57. See also, Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power* 63; Benson, “Turning the Supertanker.”

<sup>69</sup> See SIPRI, Arms Transfers Database, “Transfers of Major Conventional Weapons: sorted by supplier.” Available at [www.armstrade.sipri.org/](http://www.armstrade.sipri.org/). Accessed 6 November 2007.

<sup>70</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 145; see also LCDR James R. Gilbert II, USN, “Arms for Access: Success or Failure,” available at [www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1991](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1991).

<sup>71</sup> SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, accessed 7 March 2007; LCDR James R. Gilbert II, USN, “Arms for Access: Success or Failure,” available at [www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1991](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1991), 12, 13, accessed 7 March 2007. Gilbert estimates Reagan’s record high value of arms transfers was \$65 billion -- this was in his first term.



government engaged in “gross violations,” but categorized weapons into four groups: new weapons such as tanks, artillery, fighters and bombers, and war ships; spare parts; support equipment, unarmed ships and aircraft, radios and radars; and safety-related items. New weapons were consistently withheld, but safety related items were routinely granted and spare parts and support equipment were sometimes approved. Critics who assert that only a few countries were “cut off” are, perhaps, a bit disingenuous, leading some to believe that there were very few significant cuts at all.

The prevailing definition of “national interest” helped to prevent a massive reduction in arms transfers. From the early days of the Cold War, the United States has tried to avoid communist takeovers of countries bordering China and the Soviet Union and in other strategic regions. Arms transfers are a natural outgrowth of this.<sup>72</sup> In 1947 a special committee composed of members from the State, Navy and War Departments, noted that if countries could not get weapons from the United States, they would turn to the Soviet Union, which in turn would gain political leverage. That same leverage, possessed by the United States could “serve the interests of international peace and security.”<sup>73</sup> Under the Nixon Doctrine, which essentially was that nations should take over more of their own security, arms transfers became a major instrument of American foreign policy. So, any significant effort to reduce them came into conflict with the perceived national security doctrine – a clash of power and principle. Although Carter promised to view national security through a more restrictive lens, not all agree that he did this.<sup>74</sup> He was criticized by both the political left (for not doing enough) and the political right (for doing too much). It was not, however, business as usual. He set the

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<sup>72</sup> Klare, “Carter’s Arms Sales Policies: Business as Usual,” 12

<sup>73</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1947, vol. 2, 725-726.

<sup>74</sup> Klare, “Carter’s Arms Sales Policies: Business as Usual,” 14.

precedent for governmental restraint, and the State Department had some real authority for the first time in the management of arms sales. The Democratic Policy Committee in a 1983 report suggested that Carter's efforts represented a serious attempt to limit sales and bring the issue into the mainstream of foreign policy.<sup>75</sup>

There are several assumptions that tend to frame the debate on whether it is feasible to expect *other* nations to restrict their arms transfers. The first is that supplier states would not be willing to engage in restrictive arms sales because their economies depend on this. However, weapons exports are a small portion of total exports for most major suppliers,<sup>76</sup> and sophisticated, destabilizing weapons could be replaced by larger numbers of less destabilizing ones being exported, with the attendant jobs, foreign exchange earnings, and other advantages that would go along with this. Another assumption is that some Third World nations would see all restraints as discriminatory or as paternalism. While this is true, the nations of the South are also well aware of the dangers associated with uncontrolled arms transfers. Most have ratified the Non-Proliferation Treaty because it is in their interests to do so, and common ground could be found for further non-proliferation agreements of certain types of weapons. A third assumption is that if the country does not sell a particular weapon, some other nation will. This assumes that other nations would automatically fail to see that it would not be in their own interests to sell that particular weapon. This is not necessarily the case, and history has shown that the Soviet Union did not want a direct confrontation with the

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<sup>75</sup> Klare, *American Arms Supermarket*, 47.

<sup>76</sup> See Edward R. Fried, "An Economic Assessment of the Arms Transfer Problem," and Andrew J. Pierre, "Multilateral Restraints on Arms Transfers," in Andrew J. Pierre, ed., *Arms Transfers and American Foreign Policy*.

United States in the Middle East in 1973<sup>77</sup> or in Afghanistan or Iran in 1980. History notwithstanding, when intimately involved in the challenges of 1979 and 1980, it is easy to see why Carter came under even more severe constraints in his attempts to limit arms transfers.<sup>78</sup>

The trade in conventional arms continued to be one of the most difficult security challenges in the decade of the 1980s and 1990s. Although the collapse of the Soviet Union greatly diminished the possibility of a nuclear confrontation, it allowed the release of ethnic and territorial rivalries that had simmered under the global security system, especially in the Balkans and the Horn of Africa. Although Carter was successful in slowing down the growth in arms sales during his tenure, the Reagan years saw a rise once again in sales, especially to the Middle East and Asia. After the talks with the USSR broke down in 1977-78, there was little effort to achieve multilateral reductions until after the 1990 Gulf War. These talks also yielded little in the way of results.<sup>79</sup> In 1990 the United States surpassed the Soviet Union as the biggest supplier of weapons to the third world, the first time since 1983. American transfers were \$18.5 billion, up from \$7.8 billion in 1989, most of it going to the Middle East, even as President H.W. Bush called for measures to curb arms sales to that region. Saudi Arabia and Iraq had been the top two third world purchasers from 1983 to 1990.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Pierre, "Multilateral Restraints on Arms Transfers," in Pierre, ed., *Arms Transfers and American Foreign Policy*, 105-106.

<sup>78</sup> See Joanna Spear, *Carter and Arms Sales*; and Institute for National Strategic Studies, McNair Paper 36, "Explaining and Influencing Chinese Arms Transfers," February 1995, available at [www.ndu.edu/inss/mcnair/mcnair\\_36/36sour.html](http://www.ndu.edu/inss/mcnair/mcnair_36/36sour.html), accessed 20 November 2007.

<sup>79</sup> William D. Hartung, "Conventional Arms Proliferation: Rethinking U.S. Policy," Business Executives for National Security *Issue Brief*, December 1993; see also "New U.S. Conventional Arms Transfer Policy," for the Clinton administration's policy on arms transfers available at [www.dsca.osd.mil/PressReleases/ARMSTRAN95.htm](http://www.dsca.osd.mil/PressReleases/ARMSTRAN95.htm), accessed 20 November 2007.

<sup>80</sup> Robert Pear, "US Ranked No. 1 in Weapons Sales," *New York Times* August 11, 1991, available at [www.query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?](http://www.query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?), accessed 20 November 2007.

The nature of the problem has changed once again in the twenty-first century, and the danger of nuclear proliferation has again emerged. One of the achievements of the Clinton administration's foreign policy was the North Korea Agreed Framework, although revelations eventually emerged that the regime cheated on its commitments. George W. Bush jettisoned the Framework, and there is still much disagreement on whether this was good policy or not. Now, in 2008 the United States has once again signed an agreement, the "Mark II" version of the framework, which unfortunately has fewer benchmarks for the North Koreans than the Clinton administration's had. Critics claim that the agreement is open-ended and invites endless re-negotiation. Considering the stakes, however, it is the first positive step taken in this century towards limiting the development of nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula. On the negative side North Korea continues with its arms sales, and Washington is curiously quiet on this issue. In addition, with Iran in hot pursuit of nuclear power, and an even more unstable Middle East, the danger of the spread of nuclear weapons is very real. With Russia and America on opposite tracks today, and with the stakes far larger than in the past, arms limitations in the Persian Gulf is essential. Weapons sales have exploded since the events of September 11, 2001. The United States is the largest exporter of arms to developing nations and leads all countries in both arms transfer agreements and arms deliveries. The Near East is the primary market (defined as Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen). Asia has also emerged as a major purchaser of weaponry, primarily because of India's purchases. Some view India as a regional counterweight to China. The United States has expanded its arms exports in exchange

for help in the “global war on terror.”<sup>81</sup> Now, in 2008, even nuclear cooperation and aid to India are under strong consideration. As it supplies more and more weapons and even nuclear technology, the country is obligated to see to it that arms that are replaced by new weapons are removed from circulation; if not, then they could easily slip into the hands of the very groups the country is trying to thwart. Pakistan might be the riskiest of the recipients at the moment. It has received roughly \$10 billion since the events of 9/11, with \$100 million earmarked for protection of its nuclear weapons. Little concrete evidence is available that the arsenal is secure, however, and there are few details available about the program. The *New York Times*, which has known about this secret program for three years, has notified the administration that it was re-opening its scrutiny of it in light of the current instability in Pakistan.<sup>82</sup> Pakistani scientist, A.Q. Khan, operated a nuclear proliferation ring, but the United States has little to say on this subject, except that it was an internal affair.<sup>83</sup>

In human rights, Carter did much more than his predecessors to implement section 502B, while trying to act in the national interest. Human rights got a reasonable hearing in most of the stages of the process. Sales of new weapons to eight Latin American countries dried up, as did military assistance. Withholding weapons based on human rights records was a radical departure from the past, in spite of the fact that only a few countries were totally cut off. So, compared to previous administrations Carter’s policy was highly successful. While doing more than his predecessors or successors, he was not

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<sup>81</sup> Congressional Research Service Report, “Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 1998-2005,” available at [www.opencrs.com/document/RL33696/](http://www.opencrs.com/document/RL33696/) accessed 20 November 2007; see also James A. Lewis, “Looking Back: Multilateral Arms Transfer Restraint: The Search for Cooperation,” Arms Control Association, available at [www.armscontrol.org/act/2005](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2005), accessed 20 November 2007; Danielle Pletka, “Diplomacy with the Devil,” *Washington Post* 19 November 2007.

<sup>82</sup> David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, *New York Times* 18 November 2007.

<sup>83</sup> See Michael Abramowitz, “Musharraf Ties Pose Dilemma for Bush,” *Washington Post*, 18 November 2007.

radical, nor did he shift the “entire basis of foreign policy from power to principle,” as some have accused.<sup>84</sup>

The neoconservatives especially attacked Carter’s policies, claiming that they aided and abetted the spread of leftist sentiments in the region. Jeane Kirkpatrick, a professor at Georgetown University and later United States ambassador to the United Nations, argued that America should assist the “traditional autocracies” that ruled most of Latin America, rather than allow them to be replaced by “revolutionary autocracies” like Cuba, out of a misplaced concern over human rights. Alexander Haig, Reagan’s first secretary of state said at a Trilateral Commission meeting that “human rights, we’re not going to fuss with that. That’s Carter. We’re going to have a different policy;” but this was later changed when George Shultz became secretary of state. He clearly saw that human rights were important, and Reagan built on the base that Carter laid.<sup>85</sup>

Carter did not simply and idly criticize the morality of other regimes based on human rights. He also tried to return the country itself to a more prudent, and ethical, course of action. He tried to avoid actions that would lead to a negative moral outcome by his preference for diplomacy and patience rather than bluster in difficult situations. He understood the limitations of the United States in effecting outcomes in the realm of arms transfers and human rights. He did not engage in the histrionics of moralism at the expense of substance, but practiced the art of the possible.

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<sup>84</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, “The Unexpected Ronald Reagan,” Ch. 7; see also Shannon Lindsey Blanton, “Promoting Human Rights and Democracy in the Developing World: U.S. Rhetoric versus U.S. Arms Exports,” *American Journal of Political Science* 44 (January 2000), 123-131.

<sup>85</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, transcript, “Winning the Cold War: Jimmy Carter’s Forgotten Role,” available at [www.cfr.org/publications/9009](http://www.cfr.org/publications/9009), accessed 13 December 2006; see Manoj K. Joshi, “The ‘Human Rights Phase’ of American Foreign Policy,” *Social Scientist* 10 (June, 1982), 38-50 for a negative critique of Carter; see “Rebuffs at Home, Flak from Abroad,” *Time*, Monday, July 11, 1977 for a discussion on what the Soviets called Carter’s “ideological warfare” on human rights, available at [www.time.com/](http://www.time.com/), accessed 23 January 2007.

## CHAPTER V

## AFRICA: THE BID FOR MAJORITY RULE

## INTRODUCTION

Africa today is the most neglected continent, but it was not always so. After World War II, when the process of decolonization began, Africa took center stage, at least for a time. Although some argued against speedy independence,<sup>1</sup> by 1960 fifteen African states celebrated their independence, and 1960 itself was called the Year of Africa. The years 1960, 1961, and 1962 stand out as the high points of African influence, and the United States and the Soviet Union soon began to compete for power in the new states.<sup>2</sup> The forces of change in the developing world in general at that time were volatile, but were not always evident. The 1973 oil embargo helped to bring this issue into focus. Another signal that the southern half of the globe needed more attention was the Indian nuclear test in 1974. In addition, there was a rising danger of conflict in Southern Africa with the radicalization of black Africa, along with a mounting Soviet influence. There were, for example, still a number of European colonies on the continent that wanted to be free from white rule. As the United States and the Soviet Union emerged from the bi-polar world of the 1950s and early 1960s into a more interdependent planet, it became increasingly obvious that the lesser developed regions needed attention. Modifying perceptions, however, is not always easy, and the United States continued to view most problems through the lens of East-West.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hodder and Harris, eds., *Africa in Transition*, 10.

<sup>2</sup>Guelke, "Southern Africa and the Super-Powers," 648-49.

<sup>3</sup>Vance, *Hard Choices*, 23, 24.

This chapter will examine the Carter administration's policies toward Southern Africa. It will focus primarily on Rhodesia, South Africa, Namibia, and Angola, but other countries in the neighborhood will necessarily part of the discussion. It was Henry Kissinger who first tried to shift the emphasis away from an exclusively East-West framework toward policies that considered Third World problems on their own terms. It was difficult, and the attempt came at the end of his tenure in office. For one thing, the Nixon administration's previous emphasis on East-West issues tended to obscure the importance of problems in the southern half of the globe. For another, by 1975 the administration was in the throes of the Watergate crisis which weakened the executive branch of government and strengthened Congress. Congress began to pass numerous bills that limited the president's freedom of action in foreign affairs. When the Carter administration took office, it became its job to continue to toughen the processes for managing the on-going East-West rivalry and to develop progressive policies for dealing with the Third World.<sup>4</sup> It paid more attention to relationships with black Africa than any previous administration, believing that this was the right thing to do on principle and was also in the interests of the United States. Sometimes it succeeded in treating African issues on their own terms, not as things to be manipulated in order to gain against the Soviet Union. Sometimes it did not.<sup>5</sup> Africa was the perfect place to demonstrate a commitment to human rights, and Carter's appointment of Andrew Young to be the United States ambassador to the United Nations, the first black to hold such a high position, sent a strong signal to Africans as well as to Carter's domestic constituencies

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<sup>4</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 24.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Foltz, "United States Policy toward Southern Africa," 47-64.



that human rights was a principle to be taken seriously – because it was in the country's interests to do so.<sup>6</sup>

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The history of Africa and the West has not always been a pleasant one. The Atlantic slave trade which began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century temporarily enriched some Africans, but the wealth was spent primarily on luxury goods and was not well distributed among the African people. Another effect was to encourage slavery, long after the Europeans began to have serious misgivings about the institution. Since the slave trade was a black/white partnership, Europeans did not go into the interior of the continent very much. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century most Europeans knew little about Africa. Colonization of much of sub-Saharan Africa began in the 1870s and reached its peak in the 1880s, after the invention of the machine gun and modern medicine made it economically feasible, and Social Darwinism made it ideologically attractive. Rivalries in Europe began to affect Africa directly, and in an effort to dampen down the tensions, Otto von Bismarck, Chancellor of Germany, convened the Berlin Congress in late 1884 to early 1885 at which European powers divided much of the continent among themselves, and wrote the rules for colonial claims. In Southern Africa, however, the Europeans and Africans began their relationship much earlier, with the arrival of the Dutch in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Afrikaners, as the Dutch became known, set about displacing the natives from their lands, but they in turn were pushed northward by the arrival of the English. The Anglo-Boer war, occurring late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, divided Americans. Many defended the Boer republic against British imperialism; but, while the United States remained officially neutral, American commerce plainly favored the

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<sup>6</sup> Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 61-63.

British. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Cecil Rhodes, British Foreign Secretary, had dreams of white colonization throughout the entire continent. The white population pursued a policy of racial discrimination wherever it spread, which affected most of the region. Apartheid became institutionalized, with grave consequences for the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup>

Until the mid-twentieth century the country had no African policy apart from the white colonial powers. However, the United Nations offered a forum for calling attention to apartheid. The nation was divided between those who thought that this was a matter of domestic jurisdiction and those who thought it was a moral issue. Dean Acheson, secretary of state during the Truman administration, thought that the United States “should not intervene for what are called moral reasons in the internal affairs of another country. Moral reasons for interfering are merely a cover for self-indulgent hypocrisy.”<sup>8</sup> Beginning in the late 1950s the process of decolonization began to take on increasing speed, and within a short time almost all of central Africa was free. However, there were four large predominantly black areas not independent by 1970, where blacks did not govern. These were Mozambique and Angola, Portuguese colonies, Rhodesia, a British colony, and the Republic of South Africa, including its unlawful dependency of South-West Africa (Namibia).<sup>9</sup>

### *Strategic Concerns – United States-Soviet Competition*

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<sup>7</sup> [Rockefeller] Report of the Study Commission on U.S. Policy Toward Southern Africa, *South Africa: Time Running Out* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 342-343. (Hereinafter cited as Study Commission on Southern Africa.); William J. Foltz and Henry S. Bienen, eds., *Arms and the African* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 17; see also Hodder and Harris, *Africa in Transition*.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Study Commission on Southern Africa, 344.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 136-37; for a review of United States policy towards Namibia in the 1950s and 1960s see William Minter, “With All Deliberate Delay: National Security Action Memorandum 295 and U.S. Policy toward South West Africa,” *African Studies Review* 27 (September 1984): 93-110.

Africa's identity in the minds of others has traditionally been defined by their own perceptions of the continent, rather than by any necessarily objective reality. It has been viewed as an obstacle or a place to get around; a strategic neighborhood for other regions; a launching pad for the disruption of the interests of the maritime powers; a strategic area in its own right; and surrogate terrain.<sup>10</sup> The rise of modern African nationalism after World War II occurred at first during a time of unchallenged American superiority. Southern Africa presented complicated territory for great power relations with the rise of Black Nationalism. Western, including United States, hesitance in backing majoritarian nationalist groups opened up opportunities for the Soviet Union to gain influence by supplying arms to the black groups. At first, East-West rivalry was played out without the commitment of much in the way of resources by either side.<sup>11</sup> But the focus on East-West and communism eclipsed the potent rise of Black Nationalism.

There were some strategic interests that the United States wished to protect, however. Uranium was the first African mineral that was critical to Western security and South Africa became a major source during World War II. The onset of the space race after 1945 greatly increased the need for a few minerals which are concentrated in Africa south of the equator and within the Soviet sphere of influence. Among those that have no alternative source of supply or no known substitute are chromium (found in Zimbabwe and South Africa) cobalt (found in what was then Zaire and Zambia), and manganese (found in Gabon and South Africa). The strategic interest for the West lies in having continued access to those minerals (as opposed to any specific corporation's interests),

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<sup>10</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Africa, *Hearings on U.S. Interests in Africa*, Chester Crocker "Statement" by Chester Crocker, 96<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., October and November 1979, 126-151.

<sup>11</sup> Foltz and Bienen, *Arms and the African*, 15; see also Richard E. Bissell and Chester A. Crocker, eds., *South Africa into the 1980s* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980).

and to the preservation of stable conditions of production so that prices are not volatile. What could threaten this would be a general collapse of the social order in the producing regions which could lead to the widespread destruction of the production facilities. This could be caused by an outbreak of military hostilities leading to extended wars of attrition. This "would reflect gross political mismanagement on the part of those nations interested in continued access to Southern Africa's minerals." Since the Soviet Union had its own source of supply, it was unlikely that it would try to significantly disrupt Western access to the minerals. It would be costly and would draw resources away from the protection of its own borders.<sup>12</sup> Another strategic concern is the sea routes along Africa. Most of the attention during the Carter administration was focused on maintenance of the petroleum routes. Up to 65 percent of Western European and 28 percent of American oil imports utilized the Cape route. The country has a "very serious interest" in the route, and there is "no debate that the security of the Cape route is by far the most important Western interest in the African region."<sup>13</sup> Disruption would be difficult and expensive and would require massive deployment of naval resources as well as air power. Strategic bases in or adjacent to Africa would be of greater benefit to the Soviet Union than to the Western powers, so it is in the interests of the United States to prevent this from happening, which would be done by ensuring that no African nation felt inclined to welcome a major Soviet base on its territory.<sup>14</sup> Although the level of threat was not dire, in the absence of cooperation with African countries, the United States

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<sup>12</sup> Larry W. Bowman, "The Strategic Importance of South Africa to the United States: An Appraisal and Policy Analysis," *African Affairs* 81 (April 1982), 160; Foltz and Bienen, *Arms and the African*, 19.

<sup>13</sup> Crocker, "Statement," 128; Bowman, "The Strategic Importance of South Africa to the United States," 160.

<sup>14</sup>Foltz and Bienen, 21-22.

would have to be prepared to maintain “alternative means of keeping that route secure in the event of certain conflict.” Also, access to South African intelligence, by way of the British, was “a high utility and low cost arrangement...giving United States...a very high-quality product.”<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, there are many policy makers as well as scholars who deny the importance of South Africa’s strategic importance. Of these, one orientation is the “no policy” approach, a term used by Helen Kitchen in a study compiled for the American Enterprise Institute. It draws support from a diverse body. Some oppose all American activity on the continent because they believe it to be counterrevolutionary. Others suggest that Africa is so weak it is impossible for the country to influence the direction of its future; and because of this weakness the United States does not need to worry about which government is in power because it can get what it needs regardless.<sup>16</sup> Another orientation is that while the United States has interests in South Africa, there is no threat; the Soviet Union had not significantly advanced its worldwide interests since 1945, nor has the country suffered devastating losses.<sup>17</sup> A third orientation also holds that the United States has interests, but cozying up to the apartheid government of South Africa is too costly and would inflict damage to the nation especially in Third World countries.<sup>18</sup> It seems clear that Carter, with his commitment to human rights, would need to tread carefully in order to protect the strategic interests of the country while at the same time advancing the moral principle of majority rule. He needed to strike a balance between power and principle.

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<sup>15</sup> Crocker, “Statement,” 129.

<sup>16</sup> “Options for U.S. Policy Toward Africa,” *AEI Foreign Policy and Defense Review* 1 (1979): 26-27.

<sup>17</sup> “Soviet Geopolitical Momentum: Myth or Menace?,” *The Defense Monitor* (January 1980): 1.

<sup>18</sup> Bowman, “The Strategic Importance of South Africa to the United States,” 173.

*The Nixon Kissinger Policy – the “Tar Baby” Option*<sup>19</sup>

The Nixon years began with the assumption that the white regimes in Rhodesia, the Portuguese colonies, and South Africa could stay in place indefinitely, and that the administration should work with them to prevent violence. This was a shift away from the mildly liberal policies begun under the Kennedy administration and continued by Lyndon Johnson. A policy review of the region began in 1969 when Nixon took office. National Security Study Memorandum 39, (NSSM 39) prepared at the direction of National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, laid out the basic strategy of the United States towards Southern Africa. It concluded that non-confrontational dialogue could persuade the white regimes to reform and thus prevent interference by the Soviets and Chinese. This represented a shift “away from outside liberal constituencies and State Department primacy within the government and a shift toward an outside business constituency and Defense and Commerce Department primacy.” In addition, just as Kennedy’s and Johnson’s opposition to South Africa appealed to black civil rights leaders, Nixon’s “Southern strategy of courting racial conservatives made rapprochement with South Africa attractive.” This was symbolized by appointing “John Hurd, conservative businessman...” from Texas to be the “ambassador to Pretoria.”<sup>20</sup> Black Nationalism was almost ignored. The administration chose what is often called the “Tar Baby Option,” because it left the country stuck, like Br’er Rabbit to the white minority governments.

The response to NSSM 39 was prepared by the Interdepartmental Group (IG) for Africa and was chaired by David Newsom, the Assistant Secretary of State for African

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<sup>19</sup> See Anthony Lake, *The “Tar Baby” Option* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976).

<sup>20</sup> Study Commission on Southern Africa, 352

Affairs. Two conflicting views emerged from the debate. The first, held by the Africanists in the State Department opposed any shift in policy. This was based on their suspicion that a new policy would probably lead to the normalization of relations between the United States and the white minority regimes. The second view was held by those representing the NSC and the Pentagon. They argued for more communication with the white regimes. One of the reasons for their view was that they believed it was wrong to penalize American businessmen in the name of a “non-working policy;” another was that they thought the new policy could do more to promote peaceful change. By early 1970 Nixon had decided to emphasize “communication” with the white regimes. This change in policy did not immediately become public. They saw no strategic interests in Southern Africa, which was astounding, but there was a danger of embarrassment to the administration, both at home and abroad.<sup>21</sup>

While the British had been successful in moving most of their colonies to majority rule and independence, Rhodesia proved difficult. In 1965 when the British insisted on independence with majority rule, Ian Smith, the leader of the white minority government, declared its independence. As it became clear close to the end of February 1970 that Smith would declare Rhodesia a republic at the beginning of March, the Labour government in London began to pressure the United States to close its consulate there. The Opposition Tories sent a conflicting signal. Edward Heath, Leader of the Opposition, sent an explicit message to the administration that when the Conservatives won the general election in June their policy would be to re-establish a residual mission

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<sup>21</sup>Lake, *The “Tar Baby” Option*, 123-126. See also Edgar Lockwood “National Security Study Memorandum 39 and the Future of United States Policy Toward Southern Africa,” *A Quarterly Journal of Africanist Opinion* IV, (fall 1974): 1-9. See Also Alex Thomson, *Incomplete Engagement* (Brookfield VT: Avebury, 1996.)

in Rhodesia. The message was not widely known about in the State Department. As expected, Smith formally declared “Rhodesia” at midnight March 1-2, 1970. American policy did not change – at least not at first. The British position was that the Smith regime was illegitimate, and most Americans agreed. The UN Security Council condemned the action and placed an embargo on imports from Rhodesia, which the United States supported. On March 5, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Michael Steward told the American ambassador to Britain that if the United States did not close the consulate in Rhodesia shortly, the British would consider withdrawing the exequatur. Nixon gave in. Ironically, on March 17, the very day that the American Consul left Salisbury the United States cast its first veto at the United Nations, on a resolution concerning Rhodesia. The resolution, which was supported by the Africans and their Asian allies, included the mandatory withdrawal of foreign consulates, condemned the British for not using force to crush the rebellion, extended sanctions to Portugal and South Africa, and called for breaking all communications and transportation ties with the outside world. The British then introduced their own resolution, which urged all countries not to recognize the regime or give it any aid. After much dithering over whether to cast its first UN veto, the United States joined the British in vetoing the African resolution. In 1971, however, Congress passed an amendment sponsored by Senator Harry F. Byrd, Democrat of Virginia, prohibiting the president from barring the importation of strategic minerals from a non-communist country. The Nixon administration chose to comply with the Byrd Amendment and defy the UN resolution. This encouraged the Smith regime.<sup>22</sup> In 1973 the United States vetoed another resolution concerning Rhodesia,

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<sup>22</sup> Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 139.



again acting with the British. The resolution would have increased the sanctions and extended them to South Africa and the Portuguese territories.<sup>23</sup>

All the same, a revolution in Portugal undercut the policy and forced change. In April 1974 the repressive Portuguese regime collapsed. The new government had no desire to continue the wars against the blacks of their colonial possessions, brutal wars fought with the approval of the Nixon administration. The Portuguese withdrew and left the United States without white regimes to support, which weakened the assumptions of NSSM 39. Mozambique and Angola both gained independence in 1975, but Angola then turned to civil war involving three factions. The strongest faction was the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola), led by Agostinho Neto and supported by the Soviet Union; the faction had seized power in 1975. The FNLS (National Front for the Liberation of Angola) was attached to the pro-Western President Mobutu of Zaire, and was led by Holden Roberto, and the third faction was UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), headed by Jonas Savimbi. Because the MPLA was supported by the Soviet Union, this turned the Angolan civil war, in the eyes of Kissinger, into an East-West contest for influence. Kissinger secretly ordered aid through the CIA for FNLA and later UNITA.<sup>24</sup> Castro recognized the potency of Black Nationalism as well as an opportunity to spread Cuba's revolution outside of Latin America. It sent military advisers and combat soldiers to aid the MPLA, claiming that it had been invited to do so by the legitimate government of Angola. The secret manipulations of Kissinger soon became public knowledge, which aroused opposition from senators and congressmen determined to prevent the Vietnam War from re-

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<sup>23</sup> Lake, *The "Tar Baby" Option*, 140-148.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, John Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1978) for the role of the CIA in this operation.

occurring. This, in turn, led to the passage of the Clark Amendment in January 1976. This barred spending for the war in Angola without specific Congressional approval.<sup>25</sup> The issues and the region were interrelated. In Rhodesia, the situation became ugly when the Portuguese left Mozambique and Angola because it led to more intense guerrilla warfare there. A heavily armed white minority fought to retain control of the country against the black population which numbered more than 90%.

The collapse of the Portuguese empire prodded Kissinger to take a new look at American policy towards Rhodesia. He concluded that the Smith regime would not last, and that it would be in the best interests of South Africa to encourage majority rule in Rhodesia or possibly face a race war itself. Kissinger insisted on majority rule in Rhodesia prior to its legitimate independence, condemned apartheid, and insisted that South Africa develop a definite schedule for the self-determination of Namibia.<sup>26</sup> But this was an election year, and policy did not follow words. As Senator Dick Clark pointed out in November 1976, the policy announced by Kissinger in April 1976 could not undo the squandered credibility of seven and a half years of unwise policy. He looked forward to a reassessment of what the country had done in the past and what it should do in the future.<sup>27</sup>

#### THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S POLICIES

When Carter took office in January 1977 he also encouraged a broad review of trends affecting American foreign policy. He faced a changing world in many ways.

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<sup>25</sup>Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 137, 138; "Countering the Communists," *Time* January 5, 1978.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Department of State Bulletin 31 May 1976. See also Stockwell, *Incomplete Engagement*, 40-46.

<sup>27</sup> Dick Clark, "American Policy toward Southern Africa under a New Administration," *A Journal of Opinion* 7 (spring 1977): 1. See also, Lockwood, "The Future of the Carter Policy toward Southern Africa," 11-15.

One of the trends was the increasing connection between domestic affairs and foreign policy. Domestic ideological positions more and more influenced attitudes towards foreign affairs, and domestic concerns were increasingly projected on to the international scene. Another trend was a more active Congress in making and enforcing foreign policy decisions. And, finally, the increased numbers of middle and senior management level blacks who played a role in both the public and private sector, made human rights a domestic issue as well as a foreign policy issue. "Doing something about southern Africa" had deep personal meaning for Carter, who regretted his own slowness in embracing black civil rights in the United States. New assistant secretaries and bureau directors were critical of the previous administration, especially because of what they saw as its disregard for human rights. The State Department's Bureau of African Affairs played a prominent role. The new assistant secretary for African affairs, Richard Moose, got the pleasant task of leading a bureaucracy in the direction it already wanted to go. They believed that Black Nationalism was the driving historical force, not communist imperialism. Nationalism would be the best and cheapest defense against Soviet influence.<sup>28</sup> Moose was proud that "for the first time in many years, the United States has an Africa policy," which included a strong commitment for a peaceful resolution of intra-Africa disputes, and a respect for African nationalism.<sup>29</sup> Moose had a long record of service to the United States, having served in Mexico and Cameroon, had been a member of the NSC, staff associate for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Deputy Undersecretary of State for Management. He was well versed in African affairs and brought a significant level of expertise to the administration.

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<sup>28</sup> Study Commission on Southern Africa, 355-56.

<sup>29</sup> "Remarks by Richard M. Moose, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Before the African Studies Association, 3 November 1978.

According to Edgar Lockwood, Executive Director of the Washington Office on Africa from 1972-1980 and longtime activist on behalf of human rights for Africans, Carter pursued American ideals and principles, United States ideology and salesmanship to protect the nation's economic and political interests. There were three themes that emerged: 1) "the promotion of capitalism and non-violence as more than revolution and socialism; 2) building a moderate Zimbabwe and Namibia: disarming the militants; and 3) the protection and preservation of a private enterprise economy in order to expand the interests of international capital in Zimbabwe and Namibia."<sup>30</sup> In other words, Carter balanced power and principle.

*Young, Vance, and Brzezinski*

The Carter administration took early steps to signal that things had changed. One of the most brilliant choices was the selection of Andrew Young to be the Ambassador to the United Nations. Young was charismatic and eloquent, and was a living testament that non-violent political activism can get results in the struggle for civil rights. Third World nations could trust him as one of their own. He was confident that the economic boycott, in particular, was an effective tool in fighting racism because it brought in the multinational corporations. Capitalism, to him, was so fundamental that it was almost inevitable, and it was also beneficial.<sup>31</sup> He disparaged the Soviet threat in Africa, and believed that the continuation of white minority rule was the Soviet's greatest advantage. If those regimes were ended there would no longer be a need for Soviet weapons or Cuban troops. Young also emphasized United States economic interests in developing the African market, something that would have resonated with American dreamers about

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<sup>30</sup>Lockwood, "The Future of the Carter Policy toward Southern Africa," 11.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 12.

the Chinese market at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>32</sup> In a statement to South African businessmen in Johannesburg, for example, he said that “the places where I see the naked being clothed, the places where I see the sick being healed are in places where there happens to be a free market system.”<sup>33</sup> Young, emphasizing the interdependence of the United States and the world, including Africa, pointed out that the country consistently ran a trade deficit with the continent, and called for more government investment. He also noted that the aid that was going to Africa was largely charity, which was fine, but he believed that charity alone was not in the self interest of the United States.<sup>34</sup> While Secretary of State Vance downplayed Africa’s economic importance, he agreed with Young that the nation should not be consumed with Soviet threats alone, either real or imagined. Speaking to the Annual Convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1977, Vance said that America “must recognize the unique identity of Africa;” and that “the success or failure of the search for racial justice and peace in Southern Africa will have profound effects among the American people.” He went on to say that policies should not be negative or reactive, looking only for ways to counter Soviet or Cuban involvement, but should be positive and affirmative, planning for the long term. He also emphasized that policies should reflect American values – human rights in the political, economic, and social realms.<sup>35</sup> Carter and Vance both accepted the idea of approaching Southern Africa as a region, and

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<sup>32</sup> See, for example, James C. Thomson, Jr., Peter W. Stanley, and John Curtis Perry, *Sentimental Imperialists*, (New York: Harper Colophon, 1982).

<sup>33</sup> Statement of Ambassador Andrew Young to South African Businessmen, Johannesburg, South Africa, 21 May 1977.

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Congress. House Committee on Foreign Affairs *Hearings Before The Subcommittee on Africa*, 96<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., October and November 1979, 2, 3.

<sup>35</sup> *AFP*, Address by the Secretary of State (Vance) Before the Annual Convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), St. Louis, July 1, 1977 (Excerpts), Document 608.

the “regionalists” within the administration rejected the East-West dichotomy, and they believed that majority rule was the way to prevent Soviet mischief.<sup>36</sup>

National Security Adviser Brzezinski, while supporting the notion of human rights, took a harsher view of Soviet activity in the region, viewing his primary function as “making certain that we did not ignore the Soviet-Cuban military presence...to the point where the conservative whites in South Africa would be fearful of accepting any compromise solution [to majority rule].” Brzezinski also feared that ignoring the East-West connection would bring about domestic opposition to majority rule. What's more, he felt that the United States had seriously underestimated the influence of the “Eastern bloc” in the region “and that Andy and Cy, along with most of those at State, took an excessively benign view of the Soviet and Cuban penetration...underestimating its strategic implications.”<sup>37</sup> This marked a potentially harmful divide between the NSC and the State Department.

An additional factor influenced the Carter administration’s stance toward majority rule: oil. At this time about 40 percent of the nation’s imports of crude came from Africa, and half of this from Nigeria. The Nigerian government was a vocal critic of apartheid and of any country supporting it. This provided additional impetus for Carter to move on racial justice.<sup>38</sup>

### *Zimbabwe Born*

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<sup>36</sup> See R. Benneson DeJanes, “Managing Foreign Policy: Carter and the Regionalist Experiment toward Africa, January 1977-May 1977,” in Herbert D. Rosenbaum and Alexej Ugrensky, eds., *Jimmy Carter: Foreign Policy and Post-Presidential Years* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994).

<sup>37</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 139, 143; see also Paul Masters, “Carter and the Rhodesian Problem,” *International Social Science Review* fall/winter 2007, available at findarticles.com, accessed 14 April 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 135.

While Britain had the major responsibility for the transition to majority rule in Rhodesia, the key problem for the United States was how to support a gradual transfer of power to a leadership favorable to western economic interests while avoiding any outward show of meddling in a revolutionary process.<sup>39</sup> The United States became an equal partner with Britain, at least in the early years, in the endeavor to find a peaceful resolution to the problem. Young, Carter's point man, developed a close working relationship with David Owen, Foreign Secretary for the Labour government. Together, they proposed a plan calling for 1) an interim British administration with a UN peacekeeping force; 2) a constitution providing for universal adult suffrage; 3) guerrilla units to be incorporated into the Rhodesian army; 4) a Rhodesia Development Fund of at least \$1 billion; and 5) independence under majority rule in 1978.<sup>40</sup> The most radical suggestion was the incorporation of the guerrilla fighters into the regular army. Carter, for his part, moved quickly to get the Byrd Amendment repealed by Congress. This legislation, passed under the Nixon administration, permitted the United States to import chrome and other minerals from Rhodesia in open contravention of the UN sanctions of 1966 and 1968 for which the U.S. had voted. Nixon and Kissinger asserted that the strategic minerals found in Southern Africa were vital to the military-industrial survival of the United States and its allies. Carter tried to change the direction of American policy, and speaking before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on February 10, 1977, Vance said that the administration fully supported the Rhodesian Sanctions Bill which would bring the country into conformity with the UN Charter. Vance also noted the administration's commitment to human rights

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<sup>39</sup> Lockwood, "The Future of the Carter Policy toward Southern Africa," 12.

<sup>40</sup> Bartlett C. Jones, *Flawed Triumphs: Andy Young at the United Nations* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996), 62.

and said that this would guide the nation in its policy toward Southern Africa. This required the “firm and clear opposition to racial injustice wherever it exists.” Black unrest in Southern Africa was bubbling everywhere, but the Rhodesian state of affairs was “of greatest urgency...for there the extent of armed conflict is broadest and the threat of escalation most immediate.” Vance pointed out that he had recently stated that under no conditions could the Rhodesian authorities count on any form of American assistance in preventing majority rule. He believed that the key to peace was in the hands of Ian Smith, the ruler of Rhodesia, and “repeal of the Byrd Amendment would do far more to persuade him to use it.” He characterized the amendment as a symbol of ambivalence toward Rhodesia and international law.<sup>41</sup> Young, at his confirmation hearings as Ambassador to the UN, said that he believed that the repeal of the amendment placed short term self interest over long term moral considerations.<sup>42</sup> In March, Congress repealed the amendment, a substantial victory for the administration and a clarion signal to Rhodesia.<sup>43</sup> The repeal of the amendment was part of a broad strategy to develop better ties to African leaders and to come to an understanding on shared interests. Carter was the first president to visit the continent where he emphasized “African solutions to African problems.”<sup>44</sup>

In the meantime, a savage murder of seven white priests and nuns by black guerrillas in the Rhodesian village of Musami (about 40 miles north of Salisbury) shocked the international community. The most prominent guerrilla group, the Patriotic

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<sup>41</sup> *AFP*, “Statement by Secretary of State (Vance) Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee,” February 10, 1977, Document No. 644.

<sup>42</sup> See Bartlett C. Jones, *Flawed Triumph*, 60.

<sup>43</sup> “Anxious for a New Start,” *Time*, February 21, 1977; Masters, “Carter and the Rhodesian Problem,” 1

<sup>44</sup> Masters, “Carter and the Rhodesian Problem,” 1.



Front headed by Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe denied responsibility despite the widespread belief that the blood was on their hands.<sup>45</sup> This organization was a shaky alliance of two rivals which was supported by the Organization of African Unity and the important Front Line States (Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia).<sup>46</sup> Both Britain and the United States, along with most African states, seemed convinced that the Front should be directly involved in the creation of any transitional government. This was the most controversial element in the plan. The massacre, though, cast doubt on it as a responsible force, and strengthened the hand of Smith. Smith proceeded to work on an “internal” solution, meaning that he was prepared to form some sort of multiracial transitional government with moderate black groups.<sup>47</sup> The plan called for Rhodesian whites and moderate blacks to negotiate a settlement without the British and without the guerrillas. This would split the black nationalists. Smith hoped to broker a settlement with those he considered most agreeable to a solution acceptable to the whites. He especially hoped to entice Bishop Abel Muzorewa, head of the African National Council (ANC), Ndabaningi Sithole, leader of a wing of the ANC, and Joshua Nkomo, leader of the Zimbabwe-Africa Political Union (ZAPU) guerrilla faction into a union, excluding Zimbabwe-Africa National Union (ZANU) leader Robert Mugabe.<sup>48</sup> Vance agreed with British Foreign Secretary David Owen that this “internal solution” was bogus and would leave power in the hands of the white minority. But Carter was interested. Muzorewa was popular with Congress and was untainted by communist backing, unlike Smith’s strongest nemesis, Mugabe. Brzezinski, afraid that the country was tied too closely to the

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<sup>45</sup> “Anxious for a New Start,” *Time*, February 21, 1977.

<sup>46</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 260. See also Anthony Verrier, *The Road to Zimbabwe 1890-1980*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986), 193.

<sup>47</sup> “Anxious for a New Start,” *Time*, February 21, 1977.

<sup>48</sup> See Masters, 3; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 260.

British, also was drawn to Smith's plan. Carter played with the idea of a secret deal with Muzorewa or Nkomo, but Richard Moose and Anthony Lake, head of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, both predicted that any attempt at a secret deal would lead to calamity. Vance agreed, and managed to convince Carter that the plan was a bad one.<sup>49</sup>

Throughout 1977 and 1978, however, movement toward an internal settlement gained speed. Some in the Senate were interested in the idea, and Brzezinski continued to voice his dissatisfaction with the highly visible Anglo-American approach, believing that no real progress was being made. He favored turning the issue over to the UN or the British if the United States could not get a moderate solution, because it could become a serious domestic issue. Brzezinski informed the President that the country did not have a clear view of where it was going, and the chance of keeping sanctions was not good. Carter responded that British Prime Minister James (Jim) Callahan had called and wanted to "move on his own, with some U.S. involvement."<sup>50</sup> Two crises on the continent helped the Smith regime – the Soviet intervention in Ethiopia and the Katangan invasion of the Shaba province of Zaire. The former threatened American interests in the Persian Gulf, the second threatened to deny access to Shaba's cobalt. As the political right challenged Carter on the strategic situation in Africa, the mid-term elections saw six influential liberal senators punished, including Dick Clark, chairman of the Senate African subcommittee.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 140-141.

<sup>50</sup> Carter in Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 142.

<sup>51</sup> See Robert D. Grey, "The Soviet Presence in Africa: An Analysis of Goals," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 22 (September 1984): 511-527. Ethiopia became the second largest recipient of Soviet arms transfers between 1976-80.

While Brzezinski urged that the country lower its profile, he knew that this was difficult because of increasing polarization in Congress. The extent of this was obvious when, in the spring of 1979, Ian Smith announced that he would hold elections under the “internal constitution.” The Senate voted to send election observers, but the House defeated the measure. Elections were held in April, and Bishop Muzorewa was sworn in as Prime Minister at the end of May. Both the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the human rights group Freedom House observed the elections and both concluded they were as free and fair as any ever held. Both of those organizations favored lifting the sanctions. Although the United States did not recognize the legitimacy of the elections, Muzorewa subsequently met with the President at Camp David, a meeting set up by Brzezinski, intending to mute Senator Jesse Helms, the leader of right-wing congressional support for Ian Smith.<sup>52</sup> The administration was clearly navigating in difficult waters, between power and principle.

On June 1, 1979, Ian Smith stepped down, in accordance with a 1976 agreement between himself and Kissinger, and Muzorewa became “Zimbabwe Rhodesia’s” first (and last) black premier. All key Cabinet portfolios were held by Smith colleagues. Parliament was set up to reflect a constitution which had a blocking mechanism that included a second chamber Senate, designed to embed white power indefinitely. Rhodesian Security Forces (RSF), police and all other security components remained in the hands of whites. Not more than twenty black Africans were commissioned army officers out of about 100,000.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 142-143.

<sup>53</sup> Verrier, *The Road to Zimbabwe*, 203.

In May 1979 the Labour government was replaced by the Tories, led by Margaret Thatcher. She supported the internal solution and insisted that Britain play the primary role in settling the dispute; but the new foreign secretary, Peter Carrington, soon convinced her to abandon the internal solution. In September all parties, including Muzorewa, Smith, Nkomo, and Mugabe, assembled at Lancaster House in London under the auspices of the British government. The Americans had been relegated to the sidelines. Also, by the fall of 1979 many changes had occurred in the United States. Young was no longer in the administration, dismissed in July because of a mistake in a meeting with a representative of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Vance was losing influence quickly, and the Iranian hostage crisis began in November, which consumed most of the President's time. Britain, in the meantime, made a gigantic effort to arrange a settlement on Rhodesia. Carter was under pressure, especially from the Senate, to lift sanctions at once, but he insisted that the independence process had to be firmly in place before doing this. After three months of talks, agreement was reached on a temporary restoration of British rule, free elections, and independence for Zimbabwe, which the country would be called, based on majority rule. Carter contributed to the solution by offering the possibility of financial aid to Zimbabwe to compensate whites for land that would be resettled and redistributed under majority rule. On December 12, the British governor arrived in Salisbury and the United Kingdom ended sanctions at midnight, Carter ended American sanctions on December 15, and the UN ended its embargo that same week, followed by the Front Line States. In April 1980, Robert Mugabe became Prime Minister, and went on to govern much more moderately than had

been foreseen by those who were certain he was a communist. In August 1980 Carter received Mugabe in the White House and, as was fitting, Andrew Young attended.<sup>54</sup>

### *South Africa*

The system known as apartheid came into existence in South Africa after World War II, although it was rooted in the much earlier racism of the Afrikaners. The United States welcomed South Africa's declaration of anticommunism in the early days of the Cold War and gave little thought to apartheid. It abstained on the first UN resolution condemning it in 1952. This set the tone and direction of policy through the Eisenhower years. The country formed a close military relationship with South Africa, making United States of the strategic bases in Cape Town, sought precious minerals, and maintained relationships that might be labeled "sensitive." The CIA, for example, routinely had contact with South African security officials, and the United States furnished a significant amount of atomic information and technical expertise.<sup>55</sup> South Africa needed American attention. The history of the country plus the racial makeup of its population demanded it. Although President John Kennedy believed that new policies were necessary to entice Africans to the American side in the Cold War, radical change in his policies toward South Africa was never the primary focus. South Africa was considered too strategically important.<sup>56</sup>

South-West Africa (Namibia) had a way of sneaking into the equation. Many began to question South Africa's domination of the territory. After World War I the League of Nations gave South Africa a mandate over the former German colony. This was withdrawn by the United Nations after World War II, but South Africa refused to

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<sup>54</sup> Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 141-42; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 143.

<sup>55</sup> Study Commission on Southern Africa, 349.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

recognize this. In 1960 Ethiopia and Liberia brought a suit before the International Court of Justice, trying to force South Africa to relinquish its control. Contrary to expectations the Court, voting eight to seven, dismissed it on technical grounds in 1966. The American Ambassador to the UN, Arthur Goldberg, took a leading role in drafting a resolution condemning South Africa and demanding that it take measures leading to self determination in the area. But the resolution had many loopholes and therefore no one was forced to take any immediate action. The American grand strategy for the region ultimately depended on South Africa's cooperation.<sup>57</sup>

Portugal's colonial collapse caused a re-shuffling of the deck in the entire region. South Africa saw its outer defensive perimeter as being the white minority governments of Angola, Rhodesia, and Mozambique. All of these states were also entangled in the activities of South Africa. After Angola and Mozambique received their independence, Rhodesia was laid dangerously open to attack. The British protectorates of Lesotho, Botswana, and Swaziland were also now independent, and South Africa seriously considered extending a "pax Pretoriana" over the region, giving aid to new and insecure rulers against their rivals and in return getting their assurances that their lands would not be United Statesed as staging grounds for guerrilla attacks against South Africa. In 1974 Balthazar Johannes Vorster, South Africa's prime minister and president from 1966 to 1978, began to pursue a détente in the region. He wanted friendly regimes in post-Portuguese central Africa that were not Soviet aligned.<sup>58</sup> When internal conflict in Angola escalated, South Africa intervened, fairly effectively at first, in support of UNITA

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<sup>57</sup>Barry Cohen, "US Imperialism and Southern Africa," *Review of African Political Economy* 9, Southern Africa (May-August 1977): 85; Study Commission on Southern Africa, 349-50.

<sup>58</sup>Prosser Gifford and Wm. Roger Louis, eds., *Decolonization and African Independence*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 66-67.

and FNLA and against the pro-Marxist MPLA. While the United States probably did not specifically encourage this action it seems clear that it was not discouraged either. The intervention effectively resulted in a massive Cuban troop buildup in Angola, justified as a defensive move on the part of the MPLA government in the eyes of black Africa and most of the world also. Nigeria, at first supporting UNITA and FNLA dropped its support overnight and brought Zambia along. Congress, concerned about CIA dirty tricks and another Vietnam-style venture, ordered a halt in CIA activities. South Africa withdrew its troops from Angola in February 1976.<sup>59</sup> Some refugees from FNLA formed the basis of South African Special Forces 32 Battalion, which operated routinely in Namibia and southern Angola. Others were absorbed into UNITA.

When Carter came to office it seemed obvious that Black Nationalism was going to win over any white minority rule, and he supported this. The South African government was well aware that it was in for difficulty. Vorster somberly announced that he was convinced that if South Africa was the victim of a communist onslaught it would have to face it alone, and that certain countries that claimed to be anti-communist would probably not even sell arms to them. Andrew Young characterized the South African government as being "illegitimate," and in spite of a State Department retraction, the South Africans thought its relationship with the United States was at an all time low.<sup>60</sup>

Vice President Walter "Fritz" Mondale met with Vorster at Vienna in May 1977. He pointed out that since 1945 there had been a transformation in America that not only affected the country domestically, but also its foreign policy. He claims to have made it clear that, without obvious progress towards full political participation and an end to

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<sup>59</sup> Study Commission on Southern Africa, 353-54.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

discrimination, including in Rhodesia and Namibia, the United States would not support South Africa.<sup>61</sup> Mondale conveyed to the prime minister that there was a need for progress on all three projects, and unless it addressed the political injustices the United States would change its position of opposing mandatory sanctions.<sup>62</sup> Vorster responded by focusing on South Africa's internal problems. He screamed bloody murder and accused Mondale of demanding a one man one vote solution immediately, which was not the case. Despite reassurances from Mondale that the Americans understood that racial tensions could not be solved overnight, the meeting ended on a bitter note with Vorster interpreting the United States position as an attempt to meddle in the internal affairs of South Africa. Vorster's position was clear on "citizenship." No African had the vote and no foreign power could give it to him. On Namibia, some argue that Vorster and Mondale set in motion a method of determining its independence which, according to some observers, left real control to South Africa.<sup>63</sup> Others claim that Mondale strongly rejected any solution on Namibia based on ethnic representation based on the Turnhalle initiative, a device that would have left real power in the hands of whites. The initiative emerged from a conference held in the Turnhalle, a former German gymnasium, in Windhoek, the capital of Namibia; and was composed of Namibian internal factions and organized by South Africa.

Soon after, Young visited Pretoria and Johannesburg and further aggravated the South Africans by the warm reception he received in Soweto where he talked about the effectiveness of an economic boycott as a non-violent way of achieving one's goals,

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<sup>61</sup> *AFP*, "Statement and Replies by the Vice President (Mondale) to Questions Asked at a News Conference, Vienna, May 20, 1977 (Excerpts), Document 618, and Verrier, *The Road to Zimbabwe*, 204.

<sup>62</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 265. Study Commission on Southern Africa, 358.

<sup>63</sup> Vernier, *The Road to Zimbabwe*, 204.



much like the American civil rights movement.<sup>64</sup> The relationship with South Africa deteriorated rapidly.

On August 6, 1977, the Soviet Union alerted the United States and shortly thereafter France, Britain, and West Germany, that they had detected installations for detonating an atomic explosion in the Kalahari Desert. The United States re-aligned its satellite cameras and confirmed the information. It then issued a stern warning, along with the Allies, not to proceed. South Africa categorically denied the idea of any explosion and was publicly indignant about its treatment by the United States. Nonetheless, President Carter informed the public on August 23 that South Africa had assured the Americans that “in response to our own direct inquiry and that of other nations, South Africa has informed United States that they do not have and do not intend to develop nuclear explosive devices for any purpose, either peaceful or as a weapon, that the Kalahari test site which has been in question is not designed for United States to test nuclear explosives, and that no nuclear explosive test will be taken in South Africa now or in the future.”<sup>65</sup> For years the United States had supplied atomic technology to South Africa for peaceful purposes, and this presented a dilemma to the Carter administration. If all nuclear cooperation ceased, the nation could lose an ally in the fight against communism; but if South Africa United Statesed the technology to build weapons, the country was contributing to nuclear proliferation, something it was bound not to do under the nonproliferation treaty. For Carter, the country was also morally and ethically bound not to spread nuclear technology that could be used for making war. And yet, the United States insisted that it needed to retain a nuclear relationship in order to have influence to

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<sup>64</sup> Study Commission on Southern Africa, 358.

<sup>65</sup> President Carter’s News Conference August 23, 1977 found at the American Presidency Project at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/wx/index.php?pid=7987> accessed 3 May 2007.

pressure South Africa to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.<sup>66</sup> The administration was clearly caught between power and principle.

The South African government was probably shocked and distressed that the Americans and the Russians had found common ground for cooperation against it, and in September Vorster announced new parliamentary elections, almost a year early because he wanted a strong mandate to deal with “outside interference” in their internal affairs.<sup>67</sup> The issue of nuclear weapons continued to haunt the Carter administration. It was divided in its approach, and while South Africa stated that it had no intention of developing nuclear weapons, it nonetheless did not sign the nonproliferation treaty. Experts disagree as to whether or not they actually conducted a nuclear test in 1979, and when Reagan took office in 1981 the issue was still undecided.<sup>68</sup>

The murder of Steve Biko by the South African police provided a huge amount of ammunition to South Africa’s critics. In 1969, Biko, a medical student, was the first president of the South African Students’ Organization (SASO) which was a part of the black consciousness movement. He was “banned” in 1973. Banning restricted him from talking to more than one person at a time, but he continued to speak at various gatherings and to publish his underground newspaper “Frank Talk.” He was arrested on August 18, 1977, evidently for giving evidence on behalf of nine leaders of the Black People’s Convention (BPC), an umbrella body for the different organizations advocating and teaching black consciousness, who were put on trial and sentenced to five and six year sentences late in 1976. Detained under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act, Biko’s arrest in

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<sup>66</sup>Lockwood, “The Future of the Carter Policy toward Southern Africa,” 14.

<sup>67</sup>Study Commission on Southern Africa, 358, and the President’s News Conference August 23, 1977.”

<sup>68</sup>Study Commission on Southern Africa, 361.

August 1977 was the beginning of the end of his life. He was held for 24 days during which time he was routinely starved, interrogated, and beaten.<sup>69</sup> His interrogation began on September 6, and by 7:00 a.m. he had suffered a brain injury, the consequence of at least three blows to his head, according to a neurological pathologist. He was moved 750 miles to Pretoria, naked on the floor of a police van. He died on September 12. The deputy American ambassador to the UN broke off his participation in negotiations on Namibia to attend his funeral. Representatives from other Western countries also came. In all, more than 15,000 people attended his funeral, and Desmond Tutu, now a prominent South African Anglican Bishop was one of the speakers. In addition, the government began a crackdown on dissident blacks in October, arresting or banning black leaders. Biko's death focused international attention on the racial oppression in South Africa and fueled the unrest that began in 1976. The South African government outlawed twenty black consciousness organizations and supporting groups, including SASO and the BPC, detaining most of the leadership. The major black newspaper, *The World*, and its editor was banned, as were white sympathizers. Moose gave strong support to a House "resolution of concern" over the situation which passed overwhelmingly. More concretely, the United States voted in the UN for mandatory sanctions on arms transfers to South Africa in November 1977. UN Security Council Resolution 418 declared arms trade with South Africa (but not apartheid per se) a "threat to peace" under Article 39. In February 1978 the administration denied by Executive Order export or re-export of any item to South Africa or Namibia if the exporter knew

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<sup>69</sup>The Biko Foundation, "Biographies," available at <http://zar.co.za/biko.htm>, accessed 5 May 2007.

that the item would be sold to or used by the military or police.<sup>70</sup> In addition, no major weapons systems were transferred to South Africa under the Carter Administration at all, unlike the Nixon/Ford years.<sup>71</sup> Carter said that “what [had] precipitated the deepest possible concern...was an almost complete abolition of any voices of dissent in South Africa....”<sup>72</sup>

America had condemned the policy of apartheid for years in the United Nations, but it was the Carter Administration that was able to effectively communicate the fact that the United States actually meant what it said. Some in the State Department claimed that country’s policies were guided by political interests in the region, not strategic, and a significant component of that interest pertained to human rights, not economic concerns.<sup>73</sup> Brzezinski would probably not have agreed with this assessment. The relationship with South Africa was bound to deteriorate because of the message, and it did. Not only did the message register with the international community, but the style of the American delegation to South Africa changed as well. Carter had two ambassadors over the course of his administration, William Bowdler and William Edmondson, both career diplomats. The embassy sent observers to political trials on a regular basis, and Bowdler attended the funerals of both Steve Biko and Robert Sobukwe, another activist who was imprisoned for an indefinite amount of time for protesting the pass laws and

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<sup>70</sup> Desmond Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God* (New York: Doubleday, an Image Book, 1996), 15-16; Peter G. Peterson, Institute for International Economics, Case Studies in Sanctions and Terrorism available at <http://www.iej.com/research/topics/sanctions/southafrica.cfm>, accessed 3 May 2007.

<sup>71</sup> SIPRI Arms Transfers database, available at [http://web.sipri.org/contents/armstrad/at\\_data.html](http://web.sipri.org/contents/armstrad/at_data.html)> accessed 3 May 2007.

<sup>72</sup> *AFP*, “Reply by the President (Carter) to a Question Asked Over the Telephone by a Member of the National Newspaper Association, October 28, 1977 (Excerpt), Document 623.

<sup>73</sup> *AFP*, “Statement by Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs (Schaufele) Before the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Philadelphia, April 16, 1977,” Document 616.

who eventually, after gaining his freedom, died of cancer.<sup>74</sup> The naval attaché was withdrawn, which also sent a strong signal of dissatisfaction, because the navy was historically the closest service to its counterpart. After the October 19 crackdown, both Bowdler and the commercial attaché were recalled for “consultation.” Communications under Carter were not always welcome in South Africa. Statements such as “full political participation” or “elimination of discrimination” were not clearly defined in the minds of the South Africans, and this increased their frustration because it seemed as if the Americans issued open-ended demands that nothing would satisfy except ceding political power to the blacks. Over the long term this was probably true, but Mondale denied that the United States expected immediate compliance. Because the administration tried to avoid the accusation of meddling in South African internal affairs while simultaneously nudging it down the path to majority rule, it was accused of sending contradictory signals. Mondale, for example, spoke of the South Africans as “good friends,” and Brzezinski’s statements about the communist menace in the region were confusing. Brzezinski was convinced that the administration was not doing enough to satisfy the blacks, while at the same time was doing so much that the whites were frightened into intransigence. He also believed that the State Department did not appreciate the Soviet threat in the region.<sup>75</sup>

Another source of confusion, one present in democracies especially, was the diverse set of voices besides that of the government that spoke out about apartheid. The American business community was one of those voices that were viewed as very important by the South Africans. For example, Vorster went from his meeting with

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<sup>74</sup> University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, Document A2618 “Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe (1924 – 1977) available at [http://www.wits.ac.za/histp/sobukwe\\_bio.htm](http://www.wits.ac.za/histp/sobukwe_bio.htm), accessed 4 May 2007.

<sup>75</sup> Study Commission on Southern Africa, 361; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 143.

Mondale to speak to the Young Presidents' Organization, an international but mostly American business group, where he got a standing ovation. And a month after the October 19 crackdown, the United States Chamber of Commerce opened offices in Johannesburg. The head of the Chamber's international division's opening speech asserted that Washington could not ignore the stakes of American business in South Africa, or the long historical association with it. He also declared that business could differ with the politicians in Washington and trade with whomever it chose. Visiting American politicians also muddied the waters. Barry Goldwater, for example, told an audience in South Africa that he was "ashamed" of American policy in the region.<sup>76</sup>

Indeed, American business and their overseas affiliates had routinely violated the arms embargo under previous administrations. Vast quantities of American arms were supplied to both South Africa and Rhodesia in violation of the UN embargos of 1963 and 1966 through a variety of illicit and licit channels and were United Statesed to support the white minority governments. Arms transfers can have a destabilizing effect on some African countries because money spent on arms is *not* spent on education, health, and the like. They can also be used to secure the loyalty of the military to a particular regime. When Carter subscribed to a more rigorous embargo on South Africa (UNSCR 418) it became important to close the loopholes that undermined the previous embargoes or risk being seen as in complicity with the minority governments and the maintenance of the racist status quo. Much of the materials were aircraft and support equipment, but large quantities of arms were also shipped. Most egregious was the illicit export of substantial supplies of advanced design 155-millimeter artillery shells that had a range that

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<sup>76</sup> Barry Cohen, "US Imperialism and Southern Africa," 83; Study Commission on Southern Africa, 360.

outmatched the Soviet-made artillery that had harassed the South African troops in Angola. American officials said privately that enforcement resources were scarce and jurisdiction was so fragmented that it was impossible to make the embargo air tight. But by 1980, the State Department had taken steps to tighten up enforcement and the president of the Space Research Corporation, the company illegally supplying the artillery, had been convicted of violating the law and his company was in bankruptcy. Another example is the Olin Company which was convicted in 1978 of selling 3200 firearms produced by its Winchester Division to South Africa by way of transshipment points in Mozambique, Austria, Greece, and the Canary Islands.<sup>77</sup> Because corporations are usually driven by a profit motive, rather than sympathy for the white minority governments, the burden for enforcement had to fall on the government. Carter, during his tenure, tightened the enforcement procedures significantly.<sup>78</sup>

From the beginning, the administration supported the Sullivan Principles and urged American businesses in South Africa to adopt them. They were devised by Reverend Leon Sullivan, a director of General Motors.

The Global Sullivan Principles of Social Responsibility is a voluntary code of conduct built on a vision of aspiration and inclusion. The Principles are inclusive in that they embrace businesses' existing codes of conduct and work in conjunction with them. The aspiration of the Principles is to have companies and organizations of all sizes, in widely disparate industries and cultures, working toward the common goals of human rights, social justice and economic opportunity. These Principles are truly unique; they apply to all workers, in all industries, in all countries.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> "The Breakdown of the Arms Embargo Against South Africa," Testimony by Sean Gervasi before the Subcommittee on Africa, U.S. House of Representatives, 14 July 1977 in *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 7 (winter 1977), 27-34; Report on Southern Africa, 361; and Michael T. Klare, "Evading the Embargo: How the U.S. Arms South Africa and Rhodesia," *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 9 (spring-summer, 1979): 42, 45.

<sup>78</sup> T.Y. Wang, "Arms Transfers and Coups d'Etat: A Study on Sub-Saharan Africa, *Journal of Peace Research* 35 (November 1998): 671; Klare, "Evading the Embargo," 46.

<sup>79</sup> The Leon Sullivan Foundation, "A Global Framework for Social Responsibility for Companies Large and Small," available at <http://www.thesullivanfoundation.org/gsp/default.asp>, accessed 8 May 2007.

Moose observed that the principles came from the private, corporate world and that they brought together voluntarily American companies pursuing common objectives, and could be expected to survive a change in administrations. Richard Moose articulated United States interests in South Africa as “Preserving our national consensus on foreign policy goals relating to human rights and human dignity; assuring long-term access to strategic minerals in South Africa and surrounding countries for our own and our allies’ economies and defense; and foreclosing opportunities for expanded Soviet influence that come with protracted violent conflict.”<sup>80</sup>

American officials also quietly asked stockholders to pressure corporations, and did not discourage or belittle private actions to reduce investments in South Africa, unlike previous administrations. The administration emphasized that enlightened capitalism could be a positive force for change. Young also subscribed to the Oppenheimer thesis, the argument advanced by Harry Oppenheimer of the Anglo-American Company and others that economic gains for South African blacks would lead to political and social gains. Building a black middle class was the substitute for a redistribution of wealth or American disengagement. Furthermore, Ambassador Edmondson encouraged South African business leaders to express their apprehension about political policies that could lead to a destabilization in the region. And the United States, along with Britain and France, vetoed a motion to impose general economic sanctions on South Africa, a motion

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<sup>80</sup> *South Africa: U.S. Policy*, Current Policy 175 (Washington, DC, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, 30 April 1980) in. Bowman, “The Strategic Importance of South to the United States, 174.



that came on the heels of the arms embargo resolution.<sup>81</sup> There is strong disagreement on whether sanctions are effective, and if they are, under what conditions.<sup>82</sup>

There is a compelling economic reason that suggests that the country needed to maintain some degree of friendly ties to South Africa: the importance of oil. Throughout the 1970s the Western world recognized how important oil was to its economic health. Coupled with an increased destabilization in the Middle East and Persian Gulf region, the protection of the Cape route gained renewed interest. Although it would make more sense for Soviet-inspired oil problems to occur at the Strait of Hormuz, the closure of the Suez Canal in 1967 made the Cape route once again attractive and essential. After Suez re-opened, large super tankers still needed to use the Cape route.

By the time that Carter left office in January 1981, South Africa was under assault by the international community for its apartheid practices. Its economy had slowed, it had to invest massively in its own arms industry because of the embargo, and it paid more for oil because the Organization of Petroleum Exporting States (OPEC) had embargoed it. Foreign investment dwindled because of the atmosphere of uncertainty created by massive crackdowns on black activist groups. The regime was living on borrowed time, which it got during the Reagan years. Desmond Tutu berated the United States and its support of new constitutional proposals in 1982 and 1983 that were designed to ensure that Colored and Indians could never outvote whites, in spite of their being touted as a "reform" program. Bishop Tutu was not shy in his criticism, saying that

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<sup>81</sup> Study Commission on South Africa, 361-362; Lockwood, "The Future of the Carter Policy toward Southern Africa," 14.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, James Barber, "Economic Sanctions As a Policy Instrument," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 55 (July, 1979): 367-384; and James M. Lindsay, "Trade Sanctions As Policy Instruments: A Re-Examination," *International Studies Quarterly* 30 (June, 1986): 153-173.

the Reagan administration was “an unmitigated disaster for United States blacks.”<sup>83</sup> The country finally moved *toward* majority rule in 1990.<sup>84</sup> The first non-racial elections were held in April 1994, and Nelson Mandela became president.

### *Namibia*

The Carter administration had little time to stage its initiatives on Namibia. By January 1977 Vorster’s government in South Africa was taking steps in Namibia to implement an internal settlement based on ethnically divided representation that would give control to whites and the black minority groups that were dependent on them. Ovambo; the ethnic group that constitutes about half the population and provides the ethnic base for the South-West African People’s Organization (SWAPO) liberation movement would be at a severe disadvantage. This was contrary to UNSCR 385, passed unanimously in January 1976, which demanded free elections under UN supervision, recognition of the nation of Namibia, respect for human rights, the release of all political prisoners, and an end to South African illegal domination of the country.<sup>85</sup> The black African states, frustrated at the South African lack of respect for previous UN resolutions began to push for mandatory sanctions. While the Western nations could always veto any such resolution, a veto would cause embarrassment and would have undone any attempt to generate the goodwill among the African states necessary for the success of the

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<sup>83</sup> Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God*, 84.

<sup>84</sup> See Michael Clough, “Beyond Constructive Engagement,” *Foreign Policy* 61 (winter 1985-1986): 3-24 for a discussion of the Reagan administration’s “constructive engagement” policy and beyond, and Alex Thomson, “Incomplete Engagement: Reagan’s South Africa Policy Revisited,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 33 (March, 1995): 83-101; “South Africa, The Contradictions of Apartheid,” available at [http://workmall.com/wfb2001/south\\_africa/south\\_africa\\_history\\_the\\_contradictions\\_of\\_apartheid.html](http://workmall.com/wfb2001/south_africa/south_africa_history_the_contradictions_of_apartheid.html)., accessed 16 May 2007.

<sup>85</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 385, available at <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/294/73/IMG/NR029473.pdf?> accessed 8 May 2007; see also Briefing “Namibia in the Frontline: The Political Economy of Decolonisation in South Africa’s Colony,” *Review of African Political Economy* 17 (January-April 1980): 71-82 for a discussion of the economic stakes for the West as well as South Africa.

Rhodesian negotiations. Vance signaled a change in United States policies in the region. The United States organized the five Western members of the Security Council, West Germany, the United States, Canada, Britain, and France to try and find a solution that would fully satisfy the requirements of Resolution 385. Because of the personal diplomacy of Andrew Young, the African states suspiciously assented. The Contact Group, as it became known, began to create procedures for setting up elections under the UN, and claimed that it favored no particular Namibian faction unlike Kissinger and the CIA who had originally favored Clemens Kapuuo, Chief of the Herero tribe. The group was successful in getting the South African government to put its plan for an interim solution on hold. A year later the Contact Group presented its plan to both sides and received "provisional acceptance." The key element was adopted by the Security Council in July 1978, which gave the Soviet Union a chance to veto the plan. In the end, the SU, in the face of pressure from the Front Line States, abstained.<sup>86</sup>

When the time came to move on the plan, South Africa balked. It objected to the 1973 UN General Assembly Resolution that declared SWAPO to be the sole representative of the people.<sup>87</sup> South Africa believed this to be a sign that the UN intended to impose a SWAPO government, and stated that no negotiations within the UN framework were possible. While international capital believed that SWAPO would probably win genuinely free elections, it would prefer a SWAPO government via the ballot box, and not via the barrel of a gun. Sam Nujoma, President of SWAPO, agreed that foreign investments were necessary, and its program called for a 51 per cent share in

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<sup>86</sup> Margaret P. Karns, "Ad Hoc Multilateral Diplomacy: The United States, the Contact Group, and Namibia," *International Organization* 41 (winter, 1987): 93; Study Commission on South Africa, 363-64.

<sup>87</sup> See Valentine J. Belfiglio, "The Issue of Namibian Independence," *African Affairs* 78 (October 1979): 507-522 for a discussion of the Marxist leanings of SWAPO and the vigorous objections to its being recognized by the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

mining ventures. However, the Contact Group insisted that its effort was under aegis of the Security Council, not the General Assembly, and it had not given SWAPO any particular status, but was neutral. Negotiations were extremely complicated. Both sides, SWAPO and South Africa, appeared to draw out the negotiations while searching for ways to gain a favorable outcome. South Africa raided Angola almost at will, as well as Zambia, and established new political structures inside Namibia in an effort to achieve an internal solution. In early 1981, SWAPO reiterated its acceptance of the arrangements made by the Contact Group, but negotiations in Geneva broke down. South Africa, playing for time, refused to sign a cease-fire agreement, while Nujoma, readily agreed. Although the plan seemed to be in limbo when Carter left office, the administration was successful in moving South Africa a surprising distance towards withdrawing its forces from Namibia.<sup>88</sup> Vance, who conducted the negotiations year after year, said that putting the framework into place to negotiate Namibian independence and the progress that was made, along with the Zimbabwe settlement were essential ingredients in undoing the damage to Western relations with Southern Africa over prior years. The Carter administration, by distinguishing between communism and nationalism, established the process for improving the country's relations in the region and blocking the spread of Soviet and Cuban influences.<sup>89</sup>

Chester Crocker, assistant secretary of state for African affairs under Reagan as well as the latter period of the Carter administration, pushed for a solution in Namibia, believing that it would give the South African government room to move faster with its own reforms. A settlement still hinged on persuading Pretoria to implement the plan

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<sup>88</sup> Lockwood, "The Future of the Carter Policy toward Southern Africa," 12.

<sup>89</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 313.

adopted in 1978 by UNSCR 435 and agreed to by all parties, but which seemed unachievable in 1982. Then the Reagan administration handed out two carrots: 1) a more positive and reciprocal relationship if South Africa would agree to withdraw from Namibia, and 2) the promise of a “parallel” withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola as part of an overall internationally-recognized settlement of the Namibian dispute.<sup>90</sup> To achieve this, Reagan began to have a closer relationship with South Africa, which seemed to extend sympathy to the regime and thus contributing to an extension of its shaky existence, much to the dismay of many. Nonetheless, South Africa finally agreed to withdraw in 1988; Namibia gained its independence in 1990; and has been governed by SWAPO ever since.<sup>91</sup>

### *Angola*

Angola’s post liberation history was a disaster even worse than the guerrilla war with Portugal. During the last twenty years or so of Portuguese rule, there was genuine economic progress. It grew most of its own food, was the fourth-largest producer of coffee, and the export of diamonds, oil, and iron made significant contributions to its national income. However, the civil war and its aftermath caused an economic collapse.<sup>92</sup> The early policy of accommodation with the white minority governments, especially in the Portuguese colonies, forced it to face some unpleasant long-term consequences after the Portuguese coup. As a NATO member, Portugal had expected its allies to tolerate its policies, and the United States respected this in exchange for naval

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<sup>90</sup> David F. Gordon, “Conflict Resolution in Southern Africa: Why Namibia is not Another Zimbabwe,” *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 12 (autumn-winter 1982): 38.

<sup>91</sup> See John Seiler, “South Africa in Namibia: Persistence, Misperception, and Ultimate Failure,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 20 (December 1982): 689-712 for a discussion of the frustrations surrounding the issue.

<sup>92</sup> L.H. Gann and Peter Duignan, *Africa South of the Sahara* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1981): 68; see also David Birmingham, *Frontline Nationalism in Angola & Mozambique* (London: James Currey Publishers, Ltd., 1992.)

and air bases in the Azores. The Azores were a critical transit point for re-supplying Israel during the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars. Thus, the country was poorly placed to be effective after Portuguese rule collapsed in influencing the actions of black leaders whom they did not even know, let alone had helped. When it wanted to act in Angola, it was forced to do so indirectly through the South African and Zairian regimes. This opened opportunities to the Soviet Union.<sup>93</sup>

The major obstacle to diplomatic recognition of the MPLA government by the Carter administration was the presence of Cuban troops in the country. Young and Vance accepted the MPLA, thinking that it was unlikely that it would be overthrown, and viewed the Cuban troops as being a defensive weapon on Angola's behalf against armed opposition from South Africa. The reason for the Cuban intervention in the first place was to defend the MPLA. Vance and Young thought that a settlement could be negotiated as part of the resolution of the Namibian question. But Brzezinski saw the Cubans as part of an East-West problem, serving as Soviet proxies. His position prevailed. There was to be no normalization of relations as long as the Cubans remained.<sup>94</sup> Cuba was, no doubt, willing to support revolutionary movements outside of Latin America with money, political support, and training to guerrillas; but Cubans going abroad to fight usually did so as individuals. In the case of Angola, however, Cuba gave support to a government *after* it had seized power and was facing foreign invasion. At the time the Cubans first arrived, Portugal still had some authority over the region, was negotiating with the MPLA, and did not oppose the Cubans.<sup>95</sup> Brzezinski's outlook was a continuation of the

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<sup>93</sup> Foltz and Bienen, eds., *Arms and the African*, 16-17.

<sup>94</sup> Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 148.

<sup>95</sup> Cole Blasier, Carmelo Mesa-Lago, eds., *Cuba in the World* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), Chapter 4 "Revolutionary Solidarity in Angola" by Nelson P. Valdes, 94, 95, 98.

Nixon-Ford East-West view and his influence was unfortunate at this time because it opened the door to the South African military action against Angola in May 1978. It was nationalism, however, not communism, that was virulently on the loose in Africa – not that the Soviets were not active. When asked what the United States could do about the incursion into Angola, Carter responded that it would not send American troops into the country, and that the United States wanted peace.<sup>96</sup> In June, the president was questioned about the stark contrast between what Vance had said about wanting to negotiate with the Neto government, and the CIA's request from the Senate for back-door weapons to the rebel forces, which were also probably being supplied by South Africa. Carter emphasized that there was no plan to send weapons, which would have been against American law (Clark Amendment) and that no responsible person in his administration would violate this. He said that negotiations or consultations had continued since the beginning of his administration. He thought that

This is important, first of all, because we want to have peace in Southern Africa. And Mr. Neto, *who is the leader of the Angolan Government*, (emphasis added) has some influence on other African leaders, particularly the leaders of SWAPO, where we want an agreement in Namibia. Also, we have wanted to hold the Angolan leaders responsible for any future possible invasions into the Shaba Province in Zaire.<sup>97</sup>

It seems clear that, while Angola had no official recognition, it had some de facto recognition. Although Carter added that the country had no plans to normalize its relationship with Angola, its foreign minister had met with Vance in New York a few weeks earlier. Additionally, Carter said that he had no knowledge that the CIA Director (Turner) had talked with Senator Clark until it broke in the news, but that he did not

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<sup>96</sup> *AFP*, "Reply by the President (Carter) to a Question Asked at a News Conference, May 4, 1978 (Excerpt)," Document 678.

<sup>97</sup> *AFP*, "Replies by the President (Carter) to Questions Asked at a News Conference, June 26, 1978 (Excerpt)," Document 679.

intend to send weapons to Angola, either directly or indirectly.<sup>98</sup> Once again, many voices were speaking for the administration, and Carter was caught between power and principle.

Angola's relationship with Zaire complicated the situation. There was a rebellious faction in Zaire that fought for years against the regime of President Mobutu Sese Seko (born Joseph Desire Mobutu) from the province of Katanga (subsequently renamed Shaba). This was where the mineral wealth of the country was located. Meanwhile Mobutu supported raids by the FNLA based in Zaire against the MPLA in Angola. In turn, in a tit-for-tat move, in April 1977 and May 1978 rebellious forces against Mobutu invaded Shaba from Angola. The country kept a low profile. At a press conference, Carter reminded everyone of Vietnam and its effects on foreign policy. He said that "we are suffering, or benefiting, from the experience that we had in Vietnam. It would not be possible for the American people to support an invasion force...into the Shaba region...." He said that "European or African nations, because of close political or historical ties to Mobutu...are inclined to be more active in their help for him, we...would certainly approve of that...." He went on to say that the country did not intend to become militarily involved in the affairs of others unless its own security was directly threatened, but that the United States appreciated the action that the French, Moroccans, and Egyptians had taken. The country had already, under previous administrations, sent aid to Mobutu, including C-130s, ammunition, fuel, medical

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.



supplies, parachutes, and so forth. One more C130 was due to be delivered, along with spare parts.<sup>99</sup>

The second Shaba invasion in 1978 was more vicious. The United States, with the backing of Congress, supported a rescue effort by the French and Belgians by supplying transport in order to prevent a humanitarian tragedy. Carter asserted that the government of Angola must shoulder a heavy burden of blame, along with their Cuban military guests. He went on to call into question some of the restrictions placed on the executive branch that kept it from acting promptly, and he told Vance to review the restrictions.<sup>100</sup>

Testifying before Congress in March 1979, Moose laid out both economic and humanitarian reasons for supporting Zaire. When the price of copper dropped on the international market, Zaire's economy went south. This was exacerbated by mismanagement and corruption. In addition, the two Shaba incursions across the Angolan border succeeded in capturing the center of the copper and cobalt production. In both instances, foreign forces pushed back the invaders. In addition to the economic decline, natural disasters such as cholera, drought followed by heavy rains, and a crop failure resulted in famine conditions for more than 400,000 people, and "seriously affected an additional million in that region alone." Moose pointed out that the Zairian government had constructed a framework for comprehensive reform, but it needed to be implemented. American policy had already shifted away from balance of payments support to projects and humanitarian assistance that would make a real difference to the

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<sup>99</sup>*AFP*, "Reply by the President (Carter) to a Question Asked at a News Conference, April 25, 1977 (Excerpt), Document 674.

<sup>100</sup>*AFP*, Statement by the President (Carter) at a News Conference Chicago, May 25, 1978 (Excerpt), Document 675.

people. The United States was stressing basic human needs, such as agriculture and related infrastructure necessary for food production, and aid to refugees and the victims of the natural disasters. Military assistance emphasized basics: communications, transportation, and training – not sophisticated programs. Moose felt strongly that the United States programs supported United States interests, both economic and political stability and humanitarian concerns. American assistance was linked to Zaire's progress. If progress stopped, then the country should review its policies.<sup>101</sup>

In 1980 Moose testified before Congress in support of Angola. Moose thought that the presence of Cuban troops could be prolonged so long as the UNITA insurgency continued, and this led some to think of Africa in East-West terms, which was not in Africa's interests. He also believed that the lack of formal diplomatic relations constrained American interests. He testified to Congress in 1980 that the nation could not have expected a more cooperative and constructive relationship with any other Angolan government. The United States absence ironically gave the Soviets greater flexibility, and hampered American efforts to get a peaceful settlement between MPLA and UNITA. It also impaired trade.<sup>102</sup>

But 1980 was an election year, and a strong challenge was being mounted from the political right, which stressed that the United States should reassert its power in the world. Carter, out of office in 1981, was unable to solve the Angola question and civil war continued. It became a proxy war between the United States and the Soviet Union.

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<sup>101</sup> *AFP*, "Statement by the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs (Moose) Before the Subcommittee on Africa of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, March 5, 1979." Document 676.

<sup>102</sup> *AFP Policy*, "Statement by the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs (Moose) Before the Subcommittee on Africa of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, September 30, 1980 (Excerpts), Document 680; see also Gerald J. Bender, "Angola: Left, Right & Wrong," *Foreign Policy* 43 (summer 1981): 53-69.

The Reagan administration began its tenure first by alienating the left by its disposition to favor South Africa as an anti-communist friend. Jeane Kirkpatrick received top South Africans officials in her capacity as American Ambassador to the UN. The State Department labeled SWAPO a terrorist organization, supported by Moscow. Later, it was the right's turn to be aggravated, as the administration shifted closer to Carter's policy of keeping South Africa at a distance. It seemed it was difficult to separate the good guys from the bad. The region was so interconnected that it was like a Rubik's Cube: move something on one side, and it dislocates something else on the other side. Reagan and his advisors were most upset by the introduction of Cuban troops, viewing it the start of increased Soviet activity in the Third World.<sup>103</sup>

With the diminishing of the cold war and the withdrawal of Cuban troops in 1989 the MPLA took fledgling steps toward a multiparty democracy. Free elections were held in 1992 with the MPLA winning the UN-certified election over UNITA.<sup>104</sup> The civil war continued, however.<sup>105</sup> On February 22, 2002, government troops killed Savimbi, and April 4 rebel leaders signed a cease fire with the government, ending 30 years of civil war.

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<sup>103</sup> Gerald J. Bender, "Angola, the Cubans, and American Anxieties," *Foreign Policy* 31 (summer 1978): 3-30; see also Oye Ogunbadejo, "Angola: Ideology and Pragmatism in Foreign Policy," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 57 (spring 1981): 254-269; see as well Gerald J. Bender, "The Eagle and the Bear in Angola," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 489, *International Affairs in Africa* (January 1987),: 123-132 for a discussion of the role of ideology in Angolan affairs.

<sup>104</sup> "Angola: History, Geography Government and Culture," available at <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0107280.html>, accessed 16 May 2007; see also Michael McFaul, "Rethinking the 'Reagan Doctrine' in Angola," *International Security* 14 (winter 1989-1990): 99-135.

<sup>105</sup> Anthony W. Pereira, "The Neglected Tragedy: The Return to War in Angola, 1992-3," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 32 (March 1994), 1-28.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Carter administration was moderately successful in Southern Africa. It tried to work with, not against, the forces of change in the region. The American public had little interest in the issues for their own sake, but was interested in re-gaining some moral footing in the world. The administration's emphasis on human rights gave that back to the public. The most obvious success was in Rhodesia where Carter was able to help the British win majority rule. Carter's approach was regionalist, and the interest groups in the country advocating majority rule helped him to maintain that perspective, at least until the Soviet Union became very predatory during the last two years of his presidency. The National Bar Association, the United Nations Association, Transafrica, and many other organizations lobbied tirelessly to make sure that the administration did not lift the sanctions on South Africa. They believed, as did Carter, that promoting civil rights at home and majority rule abroad was the correct way to go. These groups allied with Andrew Young, Richard Moose, and Anthony Lake, and the combined forces convinced Carter that their moral argument was in the national interest.<sup>106</sup> Carter also opposed armed struggle as a means for transition. The repeal of the Byrd Amendment signaled Rhodesia that the United States was losing patience. It cost nothing in the way of strategic materials, since they would simply be re-routed through other countries. To help ensure white minority support in the country, Carter got Congressional support for the multilateral Zimbabwe Development Fund. He also secured \$135 million for security

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<sup>106</sup> Masters, "Carter and the Rhodesian Problem," 7; United Nations, "Constructive Engagement and the Arms Embargo," Statement before the Special Committee Against Apartheid of the United Nations General Assembly by Richard Knight, Literature Director American Committee on Africa, April 3, 1984 available at [www.richardknight.homestead.com/armsun84.html](http://www.richardknight.homestead.com/armsun84.html), accessed 17 May 2007.

support assistance for Southern Africa in order to influence the moderates in the Front Line states.

A framework was laid out for Namibian independence during Carter's years, although it did not come to fruition until later. Namibian independence depended on what happened on South Africa, and Reagan's "constructive engagement" (a disingenuous support for apartheid) delayed independence for Namibia.<sup>107</sup> This policy was commonly viewed as a failure, but some critics point out that when this became obvious, Reagan changed direction, adopting an anti-Pretoria position, including sanctions. Reagan, in this respect, was able to build on Carter's efforts in the region. Namibia became its first priority. There were symbolic changes and a fair amount of noise; but what actually changed was tactics, not goals in Southern Africa. The efforts centered on implementing UN Security Council Resolution 435 which was the plan for Namibian independence adopted in 1978 by all parties concerned, including South Africa, a plan that was very much the work of the United States and the Carter administration.<sup>108</sup>

In Angola, Carter was able to avoid official recognition of the MPLA in order not to attach itself to any particular liberation group until the civil war was over, a policy *not* followed in the past, at great cost.<sup>109</sup> It would have been impossible to involve itself directly into the civil war, both politically and economically. The American public was in no mood to put troops into the region because it would have been a replica of the situation in Vietnam. It also would have been too costly. Congress had consistently cut military funding during the Nixon/Ford years, and Carter already had to work

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<sup>107</sup> See, for example, David F. Gordon, "Conflict Resolution in Southern Africa: Why Namibia is not Another Zimbabwe," 37-45.

<sup>108</sup> See Clough, "Beyond Constructive Engagement," 3-24.

<sup>109</sup> Foltz, "United States Policy toward Southern Africa, 64; Inge Tvedten, "US Policy towards Angola since 1975," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 30 (March 1992): 31-52.

exceedingly hard to convince Congress to increase funding. It began to do this in 1978, but the real buildup came in 1979. Congress would not have countenanced spending in this manner.

Although East-West concerns were evident, especially in Angola, this did not totally define the administration's stance – nor should it have. Carter's emphasis on human rights in its overall African strategy signaled a commitment to the non-aligned states of Africa, and was bad news to the white south. Carter's strategy was logical since the country could not expect to compete in the military field, but was well-placed to compete economically.

Cuban troops were of some concern, but the Cubans were not the only foreign troops in the region. American Allies, such as the French, Belgians, Egyptians, and Moroccans were in Zaire, Angola's neighbor and enemy. The Cuban presence, along with Soviet aid, is not too difficult to explain. The disastrous South African attack on Angola in 1975-76, with American support, opened the door for Angola to seek help. The crisis also allowed the Soviets to counter a growing Chinese influence in Africa. Because of the disarray in American foreign policy following Vietnam, the Soviets probably thought that there was little risk of American intervention. South Africa's invasion legitimized the Cuban presence. Andrew Young saw them as an element of stability in Angola, pointing out in Congressional hearings in 1976 that the troops had been invited into the country by the legitimate government as a necessary response to the South African invasion. Because African nations valued their non-aligned status, he was certain that Angola would not allow itself to fall under Soviet domination. The Cuban presence was the result of previous policy mistakes. Young also revealed that he had

been asked by the MPLA representatives shortly before Angolan independence to arrange appointments for them with members of Congress. They did not want to be forced into the Marxist camp. Furthermore, Gulf Oil was surpassing its pre-war output of oil, in large part because the operations were guarded by Cuban troops against attacks by the Front for the Liberation of the Cabindan Enclave (FLEC).<sup>110</sup>

For South Africa, Carter represented a nightmare because part of his strategy of strengthening the non-aligned, majority rule states would lead to the eventual end of white rule in South Africa. It no longer had an interest in working with the United States to bring about a transition to majority rule in Rhodesia or Namibia. While Namibia did not become independent on the Carter administration's watch, independence was delayed, not thwarted, and the forces at work in the region were also slowly undermining the white regime in South Africa.

Carter also protected United States strategic interests quite well. For example, the Cape route continued to be safe from predators, and the super tankers continued to transport oil to the West. The South African press began to talk about its regional role as a "bulwark of stability and of Western economic interests,"<sup>111</sup> This appealed to a rapidly rising right. Those who expected immediate gratification, with the white "dominoes" falling quickly, were doomed to disappointment. But South Africa's perception of the right's criticism of Carter's policies encouraged the South African government, and its course of action sustained the Cuban presence in Angola by its support of UNITA. Their goal was to use UNITA against SWAPO in Namibia. In carrying out this policy, it went

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<sup>110</sup> See Barry Cohen, "US Imperialism and Southern Africa," 82-88; see also Grey, "The Soviet Presence in Africa: An Analysis of Goals," 511-527.

<sup>111</sup> Gueilke, "Southern Africa and the Super Powers, 659. See also Linda Freeman, "Constructively Supporting Repression and Aggression: Reagan's South Africa Policy," *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Etudes Africaines* 18, No. 3, (1984): 627-633. .

to great lengths to keep the relationship between Zaire and Angola hostile. This strengthened the Soviet's hand in the region.<sup>112</sup>

Some have accused Carter and Young of perceiving the problems of Southern Africa in the same light as the struggle for black civil rights in the American South, expecting that increased corporate penetration would lift the standard of living for all, while chipping away at apartheid.<sup>113</sup> Whether he equated the black struggle in Africa to the American civil rights movement or not, Carter's policies were successful, although the work was not finished when he left office. Probably the most important thing that led to the eventual fall of the minority governments was getting the issue on the international agenda. By signaling that his administration *meant it* when it condemned apartheid, Carter set in motion a train of events that, in the end, proved impossible to derail. There was a better relationship between many of the states of Africa and the United States in 1981 than before Carter took office that was good for everyone concerned. Apartheid's days were numbered, American interests were secure, and Carter's policies were responsible for this – an outstanding example of his ability to balance power and principle.

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<sup>112</sup> Gueilke, "Southern Africa and the Super Powers," 661; see also, George Russell, "Puzzling Package to Wrap," *TIME* June 15, 1981, available at [www.time.com/time/printout/0.8816.949187.00.html](http://www.time.com/time/printout/0.8816.949187.00.html), accessed 3 March 2007.

<sup>113</sup> Barry Cohen, *U.S. Imperialism and Southern Africa*, 82-88.



## CHAPTER VI

## SUCCESS IN THE MIDDLE EAST: THE CAMP DAVID ACCORDS

## INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of history, the Middle East has been a rich mixture of different cultures, religions, and peoples. It has also been the crossroads of exchanges between East and West because of the trade flowing along its rivers and over its deserts. Ideas about morality and justice that have been of significant influence on Western civilization also developed here. The children of Abraham, patriarch of the Jews, began their lives in a way that has become symbolic of the modern Middle East. First born Ishmael, son of the slave woman Hager, was cast into the wilderness with his mother when his brother Isaac was born; the privileged son, heir to his father's name and wealth, son of Sarah. From this unhappy circumstance there arose a mythology which has become the story of a never ending series of crises in the region during the twentieth century and beyond. This chapter examines the successful efforts of the Carter administration to broker a peace between Israel and Egypt. It argues that the success came because of the vast amount of work and attention that Carter himself devoted to the issue, as well as the tireless work of his foreign policy team led by Cyrus Vance and Zbigniew Brzezinski. Patience, negotiation, and prudence won the day. Carter, the idealist as well as the engineer, had a vision of a comprehensive peace for the Middle East, and a clear understanding that this would be in the national interests of the United States. His ideals stemmed from his deep religious faith and a strong sense of the

inseparability of personal and governmental morality<sup>1</sup>. He believed that peace would clearly help to avoid another oil embargo, and dampen down acts of terror perpetrated by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). While his vision for a comprehensive peace ultimately failed, he succeeded in brokering a peace between Israel and Egypt that has held until today. This effectively removed the Egyptian army from further Arab-Israeli confrontations, but it did not mean there would be no more wars. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 put an end to that hope. Carter also convinced the Israelis to allow the Palestinians to participate in the negotiations about their future and has recognized their basic rights. Carter got little praise from the press, a hostile and abusive press for him, for his efforts that led to peace between Egypt and an independent Israel for the first time in 2000 years.

### *The Setting*

The Six Day War in 1967 was another of many turning points in the politics of the Middle East, especially in the struggle for territory, which Israel believed would enhance its security. During this war, Israel took control of the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Israel now faced three major problems. First, they now controlled a vast amount of territory, acquiring it almost overnight. Second, a million hostile Arabs now lived under Israeli rule. There would be no peace – the political confrontation began “even before the guns fell silent.”<sup>2</sup> Ironically, a war that Israel overwhelmingly won has resulted in almost endless warfare, with countless acts of terrorism and brutality endured by both the Palestinians and Israelis. In 1967 the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 242, which represented the consensus of the

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<sup>1</sup> Magee, “Grand Strategy Analysis,” 153.

<sup>2</sup> Yitzhak Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979) 118-119.

international community that lasting peace could come in the region only through a bargain between Israel and its Arab neighbors – land for peace. There were different interpretations of 242, however, with Israel believing that it would withdraw from *some* land, but not *all* occupied territories. The problem festered. Between 1967 and the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the United Nations, with American support, tried unsuccessfully to bring the parties together. War broke the stalemate. The Egyptian-Syrian attack on Yom Kippur, plus the oil embargo of that year, changed the landscape. Although defeated, the Arabs made decent military gains and recovered their self respect. The oil producers also began to recognize their economic power over the West. It was a wake-up call for the United States, which realized it could no longer leave the problem to someone else, thinking that others would solve it. To be effective in its diplomatic initiatives with the Arabs, it needed to show some sensitivity to the Palestinian problem. Furthermore, there was an intensifying influence of the SU in the region, which was unacceptable. The US began to be an active intermediary between the two sides. When Carter took office he reviewed the policies of his predecessors, and he, Vance, and Brzezinski agreed that a more comprehensive approach was needed, rather than the piecemeal process pursued by Kissinger. Any effort would have to give serious attention to both sides. Because of the historic close US ties to Israel and the massive amount of military aid extended in the October War, there was a danger that many could interpret Carter's ideas as a signal that the US was moving toward the Arab side and pressuring Israel to make dangerous concessions. But Carter always believed in Israel's right to exist. The danger was in the *perception* that the US might be abandoning it. The plight of the Palestinians was the foremost human rights problem in the region. A solution to it almost certainly meant a

Palestinian homeland and some sort of self determination. Carter, because of his fundamental commitment to human rights, was the first to think about what this would mean in a concrete way. It was an ambitious agenda, and the situation was fraught with danger.<sup>3</sup> But Carter, like Truman before him, did not flinch from the task. He would use the power of the US to achieve what he believed was a high moral principle and something that was in the strategic interests of the United States.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The unrest in the modern Middle East bubbled to the surface during and after World War I with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. British and French policies in the region led to conflicting claims about who would rule the area after the war. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 muddied the waters even further, with the promise of a homeland for the Jews to be located in Palestine. Although the British had no particular interest in ruling Palestine, the League of Nations mandate to do so fell to them. There were problems from the beginning and terrorist activity on all sides.<sup>4</sup> The problems escalated after World War II, and intensified further with the establishment of Israel in 1948. The American public, stirred by the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis on the Jews during the war were highly favorable to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Harry Truman, president of the US in 1948, was driven primarily by humanitarian concerns in his

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of perceptions about Carter and his stance towards Israel see "Carter from a Saudi Perspective," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 10, Special Issue: American Blacks on Palestine, (winter 1981): 125-127; see also Edward Sheehan, "It Changes, It Changes Not," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 7 (autumn 1977): 187-189; also, Robert Scheer, "Cues from the Embassy," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 6 (winter 1977): 175-177; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 163-164.

<sup>4</sup> Lisa Hajjar and Joel Beinin, "Palestine for Beginners," *Middle East Report* 154, The Uprising: The Next Phase (September-October 1988): 17-20; Not everyone agrees that Britain had no interest in ruling Palestine. See Alexander Scholch, "Britain in Palestine, 1838-1882: The Roots of the Balfour Policy," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22 (autumn, 1992): 39-56; Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, (Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 2004) 68-73 passim. See also Alain Gresh, *The PLO: The Struggle Within*, Translated by A.M. Berrett, Updated ed., (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1988.)

support of the Jews, although politics undoubtedly was a factor in that election year. When reminded of the critical need for Saudi oil in the event of war, Truman responded that he would base his decision on justice, not oil. There was no doubt, however, that Truman faced enormous pressure from both the State Department and the Joint Chiefs to maintain good relations with the oil-rich Middle East.<sup>5</sup> As the debate on the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine proposals moved forward in the General Assembly, the resolution creating Israel seemed doomed to failure. The Truman administration put incredible pressure on heads of states and their representatives, cajoling Senators and Congressmen and even Supreme Court Justices to send telegrams urging them to support the resolution. On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly voted 33 to 13, with 10 abstentions, to partition Palestine. Even the Soviet Union voted to approve. This gave legitimacy to the Jewish claim to self rule, and the State of Israel was declared on May 14, 1948. Yasir Arafat, leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization, would later accuse the British of giving away in the Balfour Declaration that which “was not hers to give,” and the General Assembly of “partitioning what it had no right to divide – an indivisible homeland....”<sup>6</sup> War with the Arabs in 1948 gave Israel an uneasy victory.<sup>7</sup>

Every succeeding president has tried hard to deal with the challenges and complexities of the Middle East. For years the Arab-Israeli conflict had seemed frozen in

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<sup>5</sup> David McCullough, *Truman*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992) 597; Louis E. Levinthal, “The Case for a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 240, Our Muddled World, (July 1945): 89-98.

<sup>6</sup> “Yasir Arafat’s Address to the UN General Assembly November 13, 1974,” Document 4 in Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 335; see also Isaac B. Berkson, “Part II. What Can be Done – The Responsibility of the General Community,” *Journal of Educational Sociology* 18, The Jew in the Postwar World, (January 1945): 287-294.

<sup>7</sup> Levinthal, “The Case for a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine,” 89-98; Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 192-193. See also Amos Perlmutter, “Dateline Israel: A New Rejectionism,” *Foreign Policy* 34 (spring, 1979): 165-181.

time. But in the Six Day War in 1967, Israel defeated Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, and gained military superiority. The US was reluctant to get too deeply involved (the Vietnam War seemed more demanding) but did reach some fundamental conclusions that became the basis for the peace “process” that has continued into the present. The US believed that Israel was entitled to more secure borders than the 1948 armistice line, and that some sort of binding end to the war should be put into place. If the Arabs agreed, they would get back most of the land lost in 1967. This became the basis for UN Security Council Resolution 242.<sup>8</sup> After the Six Day War, there was a period of favoring Israel almost exclusively, something that any number of presidents has referred to as “the special relationship.”<sup>9</sup>

#### *Strategic Concerns and the Nixon Administration*

Both Nixon and Kissinger were troubled by Soviet power and decided to challenge it in strategically important areas whenever possible. They were also prepared to offer the Soviets a closer relationship if they would stop their hostile behavior. William Rogers, Secretary of State, thought that cooperation with the SU in the Middle East in bringing the two sides to the bargaining table had merit. Kissinger disagreed. He wanted to postpone negotiations until the SU could be squeezed out of any influential role in the region.<sup>10</sup> There were three competing national interests in the region. First was the containment of the SU; second, oil – its prices and stability of supply; and third the US special commitment to Israel. The combination of interests confounded most

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<sup>8</sup> William B. Quandt, *Peace Process*, 4-5; for additional U.S. policies, see Kenneth A. Oye, Donald Rothchild, and Robert J. Lieber, *Eagle Entangled* (New York: Longman, Inc., 1979) especially chapter 12, “The United States and the Arab-Israeli Dispute” by Steven L. Spiegel, 336.

<sup>9</sup> David W. Lesch, ed. *The Middle East and the United States*, 3d ed., (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003), chapter 14 “The United States and Israel: The Nature of a Special Relationship,” by Bernard Reich, 233.

<sup>10</sup> See Department of State Press Bulletin, 12 January 1977; Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 306.

policymakers.<sup>11</sup> In December 1969 Rogers offered a comprehensive settlement to the Arab-Israeli issue, which became known as the Rogers Plan. It was rejected outright by the Israelis. It was the last comprehensive plan offered. Anwar Sadat, president of Egypt, was anxious to get the Israelis out of Sinai, but his pleas for help from the US fell on deaf ears. He said that no one “paid any attention to the February 1971 offer of a peace agreement with Israel where Israel could withdraw in stages....”<sup>12</sup> He booted the Russians out of Egypt.<sup>13</sup> US presidential elections were held in 1972, Israeli elections in 1973, and then the Watergate scandal began to creep up on Nixon. So, again, nothing happened. Golda Meir, prime minister of Israel, was content with the status quo, as was Kissinger, and did not think that Kissinger wanted to invest his time in the negotiating effort. Sadat prepared a Plan B, which was a joint Egyptian-Syrian attack on Israel.<sup>14</sup> The unfinished business of the Six Day War needed to be settled, and if it took an attack on Israel to get the United States’ attention, then so be it. The Egyptians were convinced that *no one was listening to them*. It seems obvious that Nixon and Kissinger missed a key opportunity to move forward on Middle East issues. Kissinger blamed the State Department,<sup>15</sup> a convenient whipping boy.

The attack on Yom Kippur initially resulted in stunning victories for both Syria and Egypt. Meanwhile, Sadat convinced Saudi King Faisal to embargo oil against the US and other Western countries. Arab oil producers announced a 17% increase in the price of oil, and that oil exports to countries “unfriendly” to the Arab cause “would be reduced

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<sup>11</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, 11-15.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroid Diplomacy*, 60.

<sup>13</sup> Ismail Fahmy, *Negotiating for Peace in the Middle East*, (Baltimore, MD, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), especially chapters 7 and 8; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 60.

<sup>14</sup> Barry Rubin, “US Policy and the October War,” *MERIP Reports* 23 (December, 1973): 3-12+26; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 66-67.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982) 196.

by 5% each month until Israel evacuated the territories it took in the 1967 war.” In December OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) raised the price of oil again, making it 387% higher than it had been before the October War. By some estimates, it cost the US 500,000 jobs, more than \$10 billion in national production, and caused rapid inflation. Long lines formed at gasoline stations and the self serve pump was invented. Nixon gave a nationwide radio address in which he said that Americans were not going to have to pay \$1.00 a gallon for gasoline or \$1.00 for a loaf of bread. These were simply scare tactics devised by his enemies. A national truckers’ strike, consumer prices going through the roof, a severe decline in the Dow Jones average, and an obsession with Nixon’s unpaid taxes, brought more woe to the president on top of the Watergate crisis.<sup>16</sup> The rising price of oil resulted in the largest peacetime transfer of wealth in history. Unstable and reactionary regimes were now awash in petrodollars, with long term consequences which contributed to the rise of transnational terrorism. There were long term negative consequences for the oil producing states as well. Because the embargo caused worldwide inflation, it drove up the prices of finished goods that they imported from the West. They also lost the trust of people worldwide.<sup>17</sup>

The lack of consultation on the war also soured Transatlantic Alliance relations, especially when the Nixon administration put the US military on the highest alert possible, without informing either friends or foes, shocking and upsetting all. And recently released British documents reveal that the US was prepared to invade the oil-

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<sup>16</sup> Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 83, 153-154.

<sup>17</sup> Steve A. Yetiv, *Crude Awakenings* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 139-146. See also, Roy Licklider, “The Power of Oil: The Arab Oil Weapon and the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, and the United States, *International Studies Quarterly* 32 (June, 1988): 205-226.



producing areas of the Middle East, if necessary.<sup>18</sup> The administration also released a massive amount of arms to the Israelis that it had been withholding in order to force Israel to accept the October 12 cease-fire; and the US announced a \$2.2 billion aid appropriation for Israel on October 19. After the war was over Kissinger engaged in his famous “shuttle diplomacy” which produced two withdrawal agreements between Egypt and Israel (1974, 1975) and one between Israel and Syria (1974). These initial successes led Faisal of Saudi Arabia to lift the oil embargo, and alleviated tensions between the US and its European allies and Japan. However, Kissinger by-passed the UN as well as the Russians in his diplomacy and promised different things to different factions. For example, he told the Israelis that if they gave up a little, pressure would ease on them from the international community and on the US as well, lessening the need for further concessions. He told the Arabs the opposite: that if they accepted the small offering that Israel made, it would lead to further concessions.<sup>19</sup> Kissinger’s basic premise after the October war was that the US need not choose between Arab and Israel. Because of the US-Israeli special relationship the Arabs were compelled to deal with Washington, not Moscow. A credible alternative to war needed to be offered to the Arabs, and their interests would compel them to deal with the US. Kissinger was a good negotiator, and he developed specific techniques to produce the limited agreements. He further showed that power and diplomacy go hand in hand. But he mostly acted in secret, something that came to be looked on as untrustworthy. He did not, however, deal with the Palestinian

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<sup>18</sup> “Did Nixon Plot Mideast Invasion?” CBSNEWS.com. Available at [www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/01/01/politics/](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/01/01/politics/), accessed 22 September 2004 and Bill Vann, “Washington weighed military seizure of Arab oilfields in 1973,” World Socialist Web Site, available at [www.wsws.org/articles/2004/jan2004/1973-7061](http://www.wsws.org/articles/2004/jan2004/1973-7061), accessed 22 September 2004. See also Robert J. Lieber, “Energy Economics and Security in Alliance Perspective,” *International Security* 4 (spring 1980): 139-163.

<sup>19</sup> Abba Eban, “No choice but Activism,” *Foreign Policy* 57 (winter 1984-85): 3.

issue, although he knew that it would have to be addressed at some point. That would be left for the Carter administration to try to tackle.

## THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S POLICIES

New faces came to power in both the US and Israel in 1977. Carter became president of the US in January and Menachem Begin, the new prime minister of Israel, took office in June. By this time it was clear that US policy vis-vis the Middle East had evolved from an exclusive relationship with Israel into dual track diplomacy.<sup>20</sup> Within a few days of taking office, the Carter team began talking about Middle East policy. This year seemed like an opportune moment to construct a peace because the Arab states most directly involved seemed ready for serious negotiations. Saudi Arabia had played a key role in encouraging the Arabs in 1976. Although Carter faced no crisis, Lebanon was still unstable and one American ambassador had been murdered and another had to be recalled. The oil situation seemed constant, although another embargo was always possible, a fact that was never far from the minds of those in Washington.<sup>21</sup> Egypt and Saudi Arabia both urged the US to take advantage of the lull. Israel also seemed ready, although not necessarily as eager, understanding that Resolution 242 could produce special challenges. The Middle East is one of the riskiest regions to tackle for a president because there is always the very substantial risk of failure. Carter clearly understood this when he chose to become so personally involved in trying to secure an Israeli-Egyptian peace. The official framework under which the administration was to work was the so-called Geneva Conference which had been set up by the UN under the Nixon administration. If and when it convened, it was to be headed jointly by the US and the

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<sup>20</sup> Lesch, *The Middle East and the United States*, 234; Robert Scheer, "Cues from the Embassy," 176.

<sup>21</sup> Shibley Telhami, "Evaluating Bargaining Performance: The Case of Camp David," *Political Science Quarterly* 107 (winter 1992-1993): 630; Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 187.

SU. The Israelis and their Arab neighbors, including the Palestinians, were all to participate. The framework itself was problematic.<sup>22</sup>

Yitzhak Rabin, the prime minister of Israel when Carter took office, was under serious attack as he faced re-election in March. However, the Israeli Labor Party had ruled the country from its birth, and it did not seem likely that this would change. They would be tough negotiators, but were willing to compromise. Labor was a known element. A sense of urgency surrounded the entire situation, because negotiations had stalemated, the Yom Kippur War and the oil crisis were only three years in the past, along with the dangerous US-Soviet near confrontation and the high alert.

Carter, Vance and Brzezinski, the major decision makers, all agreed on the fundamental outlines of what peace would look like; all agreed it was in the national interest to pursue this; and all settled on the fundamental approach. The basic shell was outlined in a study conducted under the auspices of the Brookings Institution, with Brzezinski, Vance, and William B. Quandt, a well known expert on Middle Eastern affairs and a member of the National Security Council, all playing major roles in its drafting, and to which Brzezinski had been a signatory.<sup>23</sup> Everyone concurred that an international peace conference, with all parties present seeking a full peace agreement, was preferable to the piecemeal process pursued by Kissinger. Carter was willing to invite the PLO to the conference provided they accepted Resolution 242. This administration believed security for Israel would come in the form of treaties rather than territory, so Carter believed that Israel would make serious territorial concessions in order

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<sup>22</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 286.

<sup>23</sup> See "Toward Peace in the Middle East – Report of the Brookings Institution Middle East Study Group – December 1975 for the details of the plan. Available at [www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Foreign+Relations/Israels+Foreign+Relations+since+1947/](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Foreign+Relations/Israels+Foreign+Relations+since+1947/), accessed 26 May 2007.

to get a treaty with the Arabs granting it diplomatic recognition, thinking that Israeli settlement policies in the occupied territories were not productive. Carter's ideas were thus aligned more with Sadat than with either Rabin or Begin.<sup>24</sup>

It was decided that Vance should visit the Middle East to begin discussions on procedures and substance.<sup>25</sup> There was no rush to set up a conference at Geneva at this point; rather the US should seek a concurrence of the parties based on broad principles which could then be put into place incrementally. The Soviets would be kept informed of what was going on, but should not be directly involved at this point. However, there emerged a shade of difference between some who were skeptical of a Geneva conference as well as of Soviet involvement, and those who believed in these ideas. Vance left for the region in February 1977, visiting the leaders, sounding them out, and making sure they understood that the US had some ideas of its own. Sadat, Rabin, King Hussein of Jordan, and Crown Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia all were invited to Washington to meet Carter, and Vance also raised the possibility of a meeting between Carter and Asad, president of Syria. Vance reported to the NSC that all parties he had consulted with said they were ready for a peace agreement, were willing to go to Geneva, and were ready for preliminary discussions before the convention. The thorny issue at this point was how to include the Palestinians. One idea was for the Arabs to send a single delegation, with the PLO as part of it; Sadat suggested that they could be represented, perhaps, through the Arab League. The Israeli foreign minister, Yigal Allon, told Vance that no Israeli government would agree to talk to the PLO as long as it was committed to the destruction

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<sup>24</sup> Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 341; Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 188.

<sup>25</sup> AFP "Statement by the Secretary of State (Vance) Before the House International Relations Committee, March 1, 1977.

of Israel. Vance asked if they would be willing provided the PLO accepted Resolution 242, and the minister said yes. Both Egypt and Saudi Arabia agreed to use their influence to convince the PLO to do this, and Egypt even said it would urge the group to change its covenant which called for Israel's destruction. For his part, Carter had little sympathy for the Arab's refusal to make peace – some of them even refused to use the word – and he also believed that Israel would have to come to terms in some way with the Palestinians as well as the PLO.<sup>26</sup>

Vance also informed Rabin that the US would not honor President Ford's promise of high-percussion cluster bombs to Israel. This was probably because the Carter administration was in the process of reviewing its arms transfer policies in general. Vance, unlike Kissinger, was not secretive and he would not camouflage the disagreements he had with the Israelis. Rabin was dumbfounded. Already, the US had irritated the Israelis by forbidding the sale of Israeli-manufactured Kfir fighter bombers to Ecuador because they were equipped with US-made engines. The administration did not realize that for the Israelis security rested on military and strategic concerns, not peace negotiations or political matters.<sup>27</sup> Later, in May 1977, Vance assured Israel that the arms transfer policy which the administration had been working on would not hurt Israel. "We have made it very clear that we have a special relationship with Israel. We are committed to the security of Israel; and, as we have in the past, we will in the future make sure that Israel has the defense articles necessary to preserve that security, including the

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<sup>26</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 168-173; Sheehan, "It Changes, It Changes Not," 187.

<sup>27</sup> Michael T. Klare and Dan Volman, "Pre-Emptive Peace": Arms Transfers and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," *MERIP Reports* 0 (February 1978), 17-24; see also Efraim Inbar, *Rabin and Israel's National Security*, (Washington, DC: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) for a discussion of Rabin's position over time; Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 190.

advanced technology which will be required. I want to make that very, very, clear.”<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, Sadat repeatedly called for the US to use its leverage in this area to get Israel to make concessions.<sup>29</sup>

### *Geneva Conference or Separate Peace*

Washington knew that Sadat might object to a conference with a comprehensive approach to peace. His agenda, according to some, was to get a separate peace with Israel, in order to get economic aid from the US. This, in turn, would give him more influence with the US and help to stabilize Egypt as well as his own regime. There had been serious unrest in the country in January 1977 when the government raised prices for staples in order to reduce its subsidies on the goods. Israel, for its part, was determined to keep the Golan Heights and the West Bank and had no intention of including the PLO in the talks. The most Rabin or Begin would tolerate was a separate peace with Egypt, and neither really favored a comprehensive settlement. Syria favored an international conference that included the Soviet Union, and although it accepted Resolution 242, it was not particularly interested in a conference unless the Arabs presented a united front. Carter thought that successful negotiations on a comprehensive plan were possible and saw no need for an agreement on principles up front. Sadat, however, worried that the negotiations could bog down without pre-negotiations. Sadat *wanted* a comprehensive peace plan as well as a conference, and also wanted to remain America’s primary Arab

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<sup>28</sup> *AFP*, “Statement by the Secretary of State (Vance) at a News Conference, London, May 11, 1977.” Document 262.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion on how best to gain leverage over Israeli policy, see Thomas R. Wheelock, “Arms for Israel: The Limit of Leverage,” *International Security* 3, (autumn 1978), 123-137; also see George W. Ball, “How to Save Israel in Spite of Herself,” *Foreign Affairs* 55 (April 1977): 453-472; and Anthony Cordesman, “How Much is Too Much?” *Armed Forces Journal* 114 (October 1977): 3-10.

friend.<sup>30</sup> This made him and Carter very compatible, with both favoring a comprehensive plan, both favoring a re-convened Geneva Conference, Carter's desire to solve the problem, and Sadat's wish to have the remainder of Sinai returned to Egypt sooner rather than later. Neither was opposed to Soviet involvement, at least to some degree.

The next phase of the administration's efforts focused on trying to break the impasse on several substantive issues. Carter was willing to speak out publicly as well as discuss the issues privately. This was different from Kissinger's approach, which was to negotiate in secret, and much more like Woodrow Wilson who believed in "open covenants of peace, openly arrived at..."<sup>31</sup> In spite of his openness, or perhaps because of it, the press did not warm up to Carter, probably preferring to continue their "investigative" reporting of their imaginations.<sup>32</sup> This willingness to be so public vexed both Arabs and Israelis, and contributed to Rabin's suspicions of the US. On March 7-8, 1977 Rabin visited Carter for serious discussions on substantive issues. The meeting did not go smoothly possibly because he had low expectations to begin with.<sup>33</sup>

#### *Rabin Meets Carter – The Second Phase Begins*

Rabin was born in Jerusalem in 1922 and was indoctrinated into the violence in Palestine at an early age. In 1936 there was an Arab general strike, along with bloody

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<sup>30</sup> Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 341-342. Compare this to Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 188-189 who argues that "Sadat very much wanted a conference, and his views were similar to Brzezinski's, namely that there should be some prearranged agreement or set of principles negotiated prior to the conference..."

<sup>31</sup> Woodrow Wilson, Speech Before a Joint Session of Congress, January 8, 1918.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Jody Powell, *The Other Side of the Story*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984) who concluded that "the relationship between the press and the presidency is seriously flawed....it fails to provide the nation with the quantity and quality of reasonably accurate information its citizens need to make the decisions necessary for self-government." This was a serious obstacle to a president who believed that the American people had a right to be kept informed, and even to share in the decision making.

<sup>33</sup> "Carter's Policy," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 6 (summer 1977): 138. Alternatively, Rabin might have been taking a tough stance in order to maintain a certain image. See, for example, Yehudith Auerbach and Charles W. Greenbaum, "Assessing Leader Credibility during a Peace Process," *Journal of Peace Research* 37 (January 2000): 31-50.



riots, and the pupils in his school served as messengers in the conflict, then were trained to use arms. He was 14. After his graduation he was recruited by the Haganah, the underground military arm of the Jewish Agency in Palestine. In 1941, the organization decided to cooperate with the British against the Axis powers. He was convinced that when the war was over the Jews would have to fight for their lives in Palestine, and to do this effectively, there needed to be an independent Jewish force. He participated in raids to free illegal Jewish immigrants from Europe and later fought in the war for independence. This was not a man to take Israeli security for granted.<sup>34</sup>

According to Vance, the chemistry was poor between Carter and Rabin, and Israeli elections were breathing down Rabin's neck. He was also afraid, because of Carter's principle of openness, that anything he said in the White House would make its way to the media. Carter could be embarrassingly public. Rabin seemed less flexible than when Vance and he had met in Jerusalem. Rabin argued that the US and Israel should present a united front to the Arabs and extract concessions. Carter pointed out that the Israelis needed to consider going to a conference with a single unified Arab delegation. This could be disastrous in the eyes of the Israelis, because it would leave out the possibility of exploiting the traditional parochial differences among the Arab states. Carter also warned that Israeli recalcitrance in the peace process would be repudiated by the American public, and cautioned that it would be a blow to US support for Israel if it refused to participate in the Geneva talks if the PLO was included. Carter said that he was unpleasantly surprised at the first meeting by Rabin's reticence on exploring new ideas. When Carter asked Rabin to articulate Israel's "real or fallback" position, Rabin felt trapped. Rabin preferred the Kissinger way; and felt threatened by Carter. Kenneth

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<sup>34</sup> Yitzhak Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*.

Stein, a Middle East expert, argues that Carter took the Brookings Report, a consensus document without Israeli input, and “forced” it on Rabin, believing its conclusions to be fair and equitable. Carter later told him in a personal interview that he “was looking forward to meeting with Rabin as kind of a peg on which I could hang my whole Mideast peace ambitions. And Rabin was absolutely and totally uninterested, very timid, very stubborn, and somewhat ill-at-ease. The fact was he had no interest at all in talking about negotiations. It was just like talking to a dead fish.”<sup>35</sup> Publicly, Carter repeatedly emphasized that solutions to the problems in the Middle East had to come from the Arabs and Israelis, not the United States.

The principles involved in the process had little good to say of any substantive progress in the talks between Carter and Rabin, but subsequent examination of the record reveals that both Carter and Rabin contributed thoughtful ideas to what might be possible in future negotiations. However, a misunderstanding broke out shortly after the talks were concluded, on the issue of borders and security. Rabin said publicly that Carter had supported the idea of “defensible borders” for Israel. Carter, for his part, did not want to appear to be giving Rabin a blank check, so the White House clarified the US position. Carter further explained the American position in a press conference on March 9 in which he distinguished between internationally recognized borders and “defense lines.”<sup>36</sup> This incident led some to believe that a crisis was developing in US-Israeli relations, and some speculate that this could have contributed to the Labor Party’s defeat in the March

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<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 192.

<sup>36</sup> AFP, “Replies by the President (Carter) to Questions Asked at a News Conference, Washington, DC, March 9, 1977 (Excerpts). Document 260.

elections.<sup>37</sup> It was as if any move toward a balanced approach to the problem contributed to the perception that the United States was going over to the Arab side; and it proved difficult for Carter to give Israel the assurances it needed while trying to approach the problem in a more even-handed way. However, it was not Carter's public style that drove the Labor Party from power – it was domestic issues of scandal, improprieties, the residue of the Yom Kippur War, and Rabin's inability to exert strong internal party leadership, among other things.<sup>38</sup> Besides, the Egyptians and Israelis both engaged in public rhetoric about the negotiations when it served their purpose, which usually meant that the White House had to clarify the US position.

#### *The Ideas Begin to Crystallize*

Very shortly after his meeting with Rabin, Carter articulated his ideas about what steps were necessary for peace in the Middle East. First of all, Israel's neighbors needed to recognize its right to exist. The borders between Israel and its Arab neighbors needed to be open to trade, tourism, travel, and cultural exchange so that the people themselves could form mutual understandings which could ensure peace, no matter who the leaders were at any given time. Second, permanent borders needed to be established for Israel that would satisfy the security needs for all parties. That was a matter to be negotiated. Third, the Palestinian issue had to be addressed, from both a political and a humanitarian perspective. They, also, needed to recognize Israel's right to exist; and there had to be a Palestinian homeland created.<sup>39</sup> The Israelis were "stunned and apprehensive, and the

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<sup>37</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 173; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 90; and Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 287. Quandt, *Peace Process*, 182.

<sup>38</sup> For Rabin's ideas about security see also Efraim Inbar, *Rabin and Israel's National Security*; Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 192-193.

<sup>39</sup> *AFP* "Reply by the President (Carter) to a Question Asked at a Town Meeting, Clinton, Massachusetts, March 16, 1977. (Excerpt). Document 261; From the Israeli Press, "Towards a Political Settlement, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2. (winter, 1978): 136-145

Arabs were generally encouraged.” This even surprised some in the administration, because it was not in any briefing book; and infuriated others, inside and outside of government, because they believed Carter had given the PLO a very great gift when he spoke of a homeland for the Palestinians. Carter had two basic assumptions. First, the plan needed to have a comprehensive framework; and this meant that it must build on previous agreements on basic principles. Second, he believed that genuine security for Israel was more a function of its political relationships with the Arabs than of its military might. This could only be possible within the 1967 borders, with minor modifications, since no Arab state was willing to make peace unless most of the territory captured in the Six Day War was returned. His final assessment was that Egypt, the country most willing to make peace, would be willing to do so only if some broader peace process was underway. Sadat himself strongly argued this point.<sup>40</sup>

*Sadat Meets Carter – The Second Phase Continues*

Sadat is described by one of his biographers as a practical visionary, an “Arab prophet, who was determined to see an end to the Arab-Israeli bloodshed. He was contemptuous of those Arabs who still preached the end of Israel. He was a peasant by origin, believed in honesty, loyalty, dependability, and common sense, all attributes, in his mind, of the peasant. He met Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1938 while they were both members of the Egyptian army stationed in the Sudan. Together with other army officers they formed the Free Officers revolutionary organization which was anti British and anti monarchy. Sadat had a fairly checkered past. Not only did he work to get the British out of Egypt, having no qualms about shooting British soldiers, he also had no qualms about attacking and murdering Egyptian politicians whom he thought were traitors to Egyptian

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 183.

ideals. During World War II the British threw him in jail, but he escaped. In 1952 the Revolutionary Officers succeeded in seizing power. Sadat became vice president in 1964, and president in 1970 after Nasser died. He was constantly trying to comprehend what his role was in transforming Egypt into a modern, peaceful, and prosperous state.<sup>41</sup> He found part of his identity and role in a peace accord with Israel.

Carter describes his first meeting with Sadat as a “shining light” that burst on the scene for him; “a man who would change history and whom I would come to admire more than any other leader.” Carter found him to be a courageous leader who would not shrink from the idea of having to make bold and difficult decisions. They grew to be friends and trusted each other.<sup>42</sup> Vance has similar observations about Sadat. He also felt that he had a broad strategic perspective of the world and a strong sense of his role. Vance also observed that because Sadat trusted Carter, he consistently took steps that Carter said were essential, and because Carter trusted Sadat, he repeatedly took political risks to keep the negotiating process going.<sup>43</sup> Brzezinski seemed to have a more jaundiced view of the Sadat-Carter relationship, believing that Sadat was a shrewd manipulator and remarking that “he played Carter like a violin.” Brzezinski also related that Carter had told him that Sadat was like a brother. Because of this trust on both sides, Sadat depended on Carter to represent and uphold Egyptian interests, reserving, of course, some of this responsibility for himself. As a result, Sinai grew in importance, while the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and Jerusalem diminished somewhat. Carter

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<sup>41</sup> Joseph Finklestone, *Anwar Sadat: Visionary Who Dared*, (London: Frank Cass, 1996), xxviii, 1, 9, 20-21; and “Anwar Sadat, Egyptian President,” available at <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/kbank/profiles/sadat/>. Accessed 29 May 2007.

<sup>42</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 289, 291..

<sup>43</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 174-175.

had no comparable relationship with any other player. This made Israel even more nervous.<sup>44</sup>

Carter's meeting with Assad of Syria in Geneva also seemed problematic to the Israelis. Assad was less open to direct negotiations with Israel. Because of the perceived close ties to the SU, Syria was not consulted on much of anything except the Golan Heights. Assad was open, however, to an international conference because this would allow Syria to try to thwart a separate agreement between Egypt and Israel. The Syrian foreign minister who was in on the meeting said that "Carter left a comfortable impression, an impression that showed he wanted to obtain a solution on a moral basis." To some, this meant "the Israelis giving and the Arabs taking." Later, Assad turned cold to the entire process and soon sabotaged the Geneva talks by refusing to attend, and later still, he tried to prevent the Camp David agreement from being implemented.<sup>45</sup>

Sadat proved willing to accept the fact that peace with Israel entailed the exchange of diplomats and full recognition; and the Israelis seemed willing to withdraw from the West Bank, at least in private, although were adamantly opposed to an independent Palestinian state there. They also were open to the idea that security did not necessarily require significant territory beyond the 1967 borders. All talked about the need to solve the Palestinian problem if there was to be peace in the region, and the Arabs confidently predicted that the PLO would soften its stance towards Israel. So, by mid 1977, in spite of Carter's feelings of frustrations, his peace initiative was well underway.

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<sup>44</sup> "The Reaction to Sadat," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3. (spring, 1978): 178-180.

<sup>45</sup> For a discussion of Syrian dependence on the Soviet Union for its security, see Efraim Karsh, *The Soviet Union and Syria: The Asad Years*. Chatham House Papers. The Royal Institute of International Affairs (London: Routledge, 1988.) Karsh argues that after Sadat defected from the Arabs, Syria's dependence on the SU grew because of an ascending Israel which had total US backing; Jimmy Carter *Keeping Faith*, 290.

Then, on June 21, 1977 Menachem Begin became prime minister of Israel after his Likud Party won elections in May. He was somewhat unknown in Washington, but the administration was aware that he opposed any territorial compromise with Jordan regarding the West Bank and the Palestinians. He was also committed to settlements in the occupied territories. There would be no warm relationship with Begin as there was with Sadat. No mutual support for risks taken.<sup>46</sup>

### *Carter Searches for Support*

Brzezinski was confident that Carter could get substantial support from a large segment of the American Jewish community for his efforts, which he needed, precisely because Begin was so extreme. The Jewish community, however, went in a different direction. The administration realized that it needed to actively pursue American Jewish leaders and get them on board with the peace process. Although Carter did not have ties to the Jewish community in the US, his vice president, Mondale, did. Oil always was the silent partner in the room, however, which of course, gave the Arabs, especially the oil producing states, clout in Washington. Carter subsequently met with Arthur Goldberg, former Supreme Court justice and ambassador to the United Nations under Lyndon Johnson. Brzezinski suggested that he become an unofficial emissary to the Middle East, but Vance objected, or as Brzezinski said, "Cy did not relish sharing the Middle East with him."<sup>47</sup> This points once again to the intense rivalry between the NSC and the State Department. Carter writes that he faced similar problems with both the Arabs and the American Jews. Privately both said they supported the peace process, publicly this was

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<sup>46</sup> Erwin C. Hargrove, *Jimmy Carter as President*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 125-26; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 183

<sup>47</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 96.

not so.<sup>48</sup> The “homeland for the Palestinians” remark was of special concern to the Israelis as well as their American counterparts, because the situation was enormously complicated. Where would it be? In territories Israel gained from other countries in the 1967 war?<sup>49</sup> Carter understood that he needed more support for his ideas from those in his own party, but not everyone was willing to speak up because of the power of the Israeli lobby.<sup>50</sup> Carter turned to Senator Hubert Humphrey, who was a friend Israel knew it could count on. Humphrey, in their initial meeting gave Carter full support, and returned the next week with other legislative leaders. There were additional meetings including one with Tip O’Neill, Speaker of the House, as Carter lined up needed support for his ideas, especially in light of the imminent meeting with Begin. Most congressional leaders, although not all, were supportive. He also met with American Jewish leaders to explain his ideas, and believed that their concerns were at least partially addressed<sup>51</sup>.

### *Begin Meets Carter*

Begin had pushed for Israel to claim the entire region called Palestine in World War One, namely both banks of the Jordan River, including present day Jordan. Begin was a Pole who joined the army to fight the Nazis during World War Two. He landed in Palestine in 1942 and, after his discharge in 1943, stayed in Palestine and took over the

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<sup>48</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 294.; Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 316.

<sup>49</sup> Robert A. Strong, *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 185; See Carter’s remarks December 28, 1977 in Don Richardson, ed., *Conversations With Carter*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers) “Interview with the President, December 28, 1977, White House Press Release, Barbara Walters, Robert McNeil, Tom Brokaw, and Bob Schieffer. 132-133; Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 194-195

<sup>50</sup> For an interesting discussion on this topic see John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, “The Israel Lobby,” *London Review of Books* 28 (March 23, 2006), available at [www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n06/print/mear01.html](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n06/print/mear01.html). Accessed 21 May 2007. See also Hargrove, *Jimmy Carter as President*, 125-127; James Petras, *The Power of Israel in the United States*, (Atlanta: Clarity Press, Inc., 2006).

<sup>51</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 297-298; AFP “Remarks by the President (Carter) Before the General Council of the World Jewish Congress, Washington, DC, November 2, 1977 (Excerpts).” Document 272.



leadership of the Urgan Zvai Leumi, a guerrilla organization that wanted to get the British out of the region. He was forced to go into hiding to avoid capture by the British for what some called his terrorist methods.<sup>52</sup> He was branded Public Enemy No.1 by the British and had a \$30,000 price tag on his head.<sup>53</sup> When he took power in 1977 it provoked an outrage, especially in Britain, as if it were still 1948. “Israel’s founding father reaps the rewards of terrorism,” wrote Louis Heron in the *London Times*.” CBS branded him an ex-terrorist, but then had to apologize.<sup>54</sup> He talked incessantly about Israel’s claim to the West Bank, or Judea and Samaria as he called it. “Kind...Honest...Dangerous” was how *Time Magazine* described him.<sup>55</sup> The Israelis knew they had elected their first ideological prime minister. Israel, he said, would not ask any nation for recognition, saying, “We were granted our right to exist by the God of our fathers, at the glimmer of the dawn of human civilization nearly four thousand years ago.” He sought a different “recognition,” one that was “required between ourselves and our neighbors: recognition of sovereignty and of the common need for a life of peace and understanding. It is this mutual recognition that we look forward to. For it we shall make every possible effort.”<sup>56</sup>

Carter and his advisors thought his initial meeting with Rabin went badly, and the administration girded itself for the meeting with Begin, which could have been a nightmare. Carter, however, took the proper approach, and it ended up a far more cordial

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<sup>52</sup> For an account of Begin’s rise to power see also Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel and the Peace Process, 1977-1982* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1994); Quandt, *Peace Process*, 183; Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* 269, 179-181.

<sup>53</sup> *Time Magazine*, 30 May 1977. Available at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,914950,00.html>. Accessed 29 May 2007.

<sup>54</sup> Eric Silver, *Begin: The Haunted Prophet*, (New York: Random House, 1984), 166.

<sup>55</sup> *Time Magazine*, 30 May 1977. Available at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,914950,00.html>. Accessed 29 May 20/07.

<sup>56</sup> Silver, *Begin: The Haunted Prophet*, 167; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 179-180.

encounter than the meeting with Rabin. Begin was considered by some to be a political outsider, and had been criticized by David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister for his prior activities in Urgan. Begin, therefore, craved acceptance, both from his fellow countrymen and the American president. This might make him susceptible to flattery. Different people in the administration had different advice for how to treat him: His thinking was that if the US gave Begin support, he would seem to be a strong leader, different from Rabin.<sup>57</sup> Honey attracts more than vinegar; that was the plan.

Carter had expected that Begin would be tenacious, but he was also quite stubborn. For example, when Carter asked for flexibility on the West Bank issue, Begin unrolled a national security map of the region, explaining that it would be foolish to allow Arab artillery back into the area, and linked his reasons back to the Nazi Holocaust. When Carter advised him not to go through with the huge settlement he planned for the West Bank and the other occupied territories, Begin gave him a prepared list of how many American cities with Biblical names there were in the US, and asked him what he would say if the governors of those states said no Jews were allowed in those cities. Israeli embassy officials accompanying Begin understood that this could not be the last word. When they returned to Blair House, the presidential guest house, they asked him what he was going to do. Begin responded that "he would build the settlements as planned. The Americans, he predicted, would turn cold for six months, then they would revert to normal."<sup>58</sup> Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel, Sadat's foreign minister thought that any comprehensive peace Sadat pursued had to include a solution to the Palestinian problem.

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<sup>57</sup> Israel News, "Carter and Begin: Historical Debate," 10 February 2007, available at [www.zionism-israel.com/israel\\_news/2007/02/](http://www.zionism-israel.com/israel_news/2007/02/) accessed 16 December 2007; Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 199.

<sup>58</sup> Silver, *Begin: The Haunted Prophet*, 168

This was vital.<sup>59</sup> In the end there was no solution for the Palestinians, and there has been trouble and terrorism ever since.

The issue of how the negotiations should proceed went smoother. Begin was far more flexible on this. There is some disagreement on whether or not Begin was also interested in discussing substance. According to some, Begin thought the US should not involve itself in the substance of the differences between Israel and the Arabs, but should limit its role to facilitating the meeting. He suggested “proximity talks” in which there would be direct negotiations between the parties, facilitated by a mediator if necessary. This was a mechanism proposed by the US in 1972 to get the parties to begin talking. Previous Israeli governments wanted the US directly involved; but Begin seemed the opposite, possibly because he suspected that the US was now closer to the Arab position than in previous times. Unfortunately for Begin, the US was very far along in developing its own ideas as to what was necessary for a settlement. Five principles had been developed by July when Begin visited, and these were discussed at the meeting. First, the peace should be comprehensive. Second, Resolutions 242 and 338 (which fundamentally said that 242 should be implemented) were to be the bases of negotiation. Third, the goal of peace was to be normal relations, not just the end of belligerency. The fourth goal dealt with borders and withdrawal from territories in stages; and the fifth concerned Palestinians and their rights, including a means “to permit self-determination by the Palestinians in deciding on their future status.” Begin rejected outright the fifth point on the Palestinians; and insisted that the US not discuss the issue of borders, either publicly or privately, or the fact that it favored withdrawal to the 1967 lines, with minor

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<sup>59</sup> Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel, *The Camp David Accords* (London: KPI Limited, 1986), 125.

modifications.<sup>60</sup> During the evening session when Carter and Begin were alone, Carter agreed not to mention the borders issue publicly, if Begin would show restraints on settlements. This compromise was necessary in order to calm things down before the Geneva meeting. It probably also reflected a subtle shift in thinking on Washington's part, namely accepting the fact that little progress could be made until the parties concerned talked with each other, given the wide gap between Begin's attitude and that of even the most moderate Arab leaders. Begin was adamant about the West Bank settlements. The disagreement over this was fully evident by the end of the Camp David negotiations, and this tended to poison US-Israeli relations until Carter left office. The first meeting, however, ended on a positive note, with both Begin and Carter avoiding a mutual confrontation. Brzezinski took a more negative view of the meeting, saying it "did little to advance the prospects for peace" because Carter was too soft on Begin. Nonetheless, there was a growing consensus that emerged from the meeting: the idea that another Egyptian-Israeli agreement was possible.<sup>61</sup>

### *The PLO and Representation*

Vance began to focus on the issue of PLO representation at Geneva. He began to lean towards the idea of a single Arab delegation, which would include Palestinians. Israel was adamant in its refusal to deal with the PLO as a separate delegation. The PLO is an organization that grew out of the Palestinian resistance movement that opposed the

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<sup>60</sup> Robert A. Strong, *Working in the World*, 185; From the Israeli Press, "Towards a Political Settlement," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 7 (winter, 1978): 136-145; Compare Quandt, *Peace Process*, 184 with Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 199-200, especially concerning Begin and Palestinian self-determination. Stein later argues that the real bone of contention on Palestinian self rule was the West Bank. See also Harold H. Saunders "US Interests and Goals in the Middle East," *MERIP Reports* 70. (September 1978): 12-15+25; and Ashraf Ghorbal, "The Way to Perceive Peace in the Middle East." *International Security*, 2, no. 3. (winter, 1978): 13-21.

<sup>61</sup> See Amos Perlmutter, "Dateline Israel: A New Rejectionism," 165-181, for his evaluation of what the Israelis actually wanted; Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy* 201- 202.

massive growth in immigration of the Jews to Palestine during the 1930s and in the aftermath of World War II, as well as the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. This resistance movement was disorganized and spoke with many voices, all of whom had the common goal of driving out the occupiers of Palestine. But in 1964 the Palestine Liberation Organization was formed in the Jordanian portion of Jerusalem, and the resistance movement became more united in both its deeds and its thoughts. The PLO became the most authentic voice of the Palestinian people. In 1968 Yasir Arafat of the Fatah movement became its leader and in 1974 the United Nations recognized the organization as the legitimate representative of the Palestinians. It has taken “military action” against both Israelis and other people, civilian and military, and is well hated by the Israelis. The ideology of the PLO developed slowly, but moved from the idea of total destruction of Israel to de facto acceptance of it. It did not, however, accept Resolution 242 until 1988, although there is some disagreement on this.<sup>62</sup> This was problematic for the Israelis.

The Israelis were willing to deal with the Palestinians if they were part of the Jordanian delegation, but Jordan had no intention of representing them. It agreed with the Syrian position that a common Arab front was the best idea, primarily as a way to prevent unilateral moves by Egypt. Egypt, for its part, was flexible, but did favor a PLO delegation. This was an important difference between Egypt and its Arab neighbors. In August 1977, Vance left on an important trip to the Middle East. He took a revised five

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<sup>62</sup> Alain Gresh, *The PLO: The Struggle Within*, Introduction, 1-5; “Statement by the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Beirut, 18 August 18 in “[Documents and Source Material]: Arab Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 7 (winter 1978): 174; Views from Abroad, “An Opening for US PLO Talks? *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2. (winter, 1979): 173-175. Arafat agreed to de facto recognition of Israel, according to Congressman Paul Findley, and “would live in peace with all its neighbors.” Many assert that this is an acceptance of UNSCRs 242 and 338.

principles with him, taking into consideration Begin's comments. The principles still included the idea of a "Palestinian entity" which Begin had rejected. Just prior to leaving, Simcha Dinitz, the Israeli ambassador to the US went to see Vance on Begin's instructions. Begin had not meant that Resolution 242 required *withdrawal* on all fronts – that was not what he had meant by "withdrawal from occupied territories." Begin planned to pursue a solution that would not include withdrawal from the West Bank. Vance was furious at the "backsliding from an agreement we had reached." Dinitz also said that unless the US changed its position on Palestinian representation to specify that they could only be represented as part of the Jordanian delegation, and drop all reference to the PLO, then Israel would agree to *none* of the principles. Vance held his ground, saying that the US would present the principles as they were and inform the Arabs of the Israeli position. He also would inform the Arabs that the US did not accept the Israeli position as the only way the Palestinians could be represented. Vance reported this to Carter, but almost immediately Dinitz returned and said that Begin asked that Vance not tell the Arabs the Israeli views on the question of borders. Although the US position was clear, Carter had promised that there would be no more public statements, but Vance said the US would continue to state its views privately. Carter was committed to principle of evenhandedness – the US would not join Israel in ganging up on the Arabs.<sup>63</sup> The Americans began to increase pressure on the Israelis. Vance proceeded to the Middle East and called on leaders in Egypt, Israel, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon, and offered suggestions on how the Palestinians could be represented at Geneva, as well as a new idea of some form of trusteeship for the West Bank and Gaza.

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<sup>63</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 185, 186.

Sadat was concerned about the turn from substance to procedures prior to Geneva. Sadat presented Vance with a secret draft of a peace treaty Egypt was willing to sign. He asked Vance to get the Israelis to draft their own treaty, and then the US could broker a compromise. Sadat made handwritten notes on further concessions in the margins, perhaps to convince Vance that he was serious and flexible, except on land and sovereignty. He used this tactic repeatedly. Vance was encouraged to believe that the PLO was ready to change its position on Resolution 242. He recommended that Carter publicly repeat that the US would negotiate directly with the PLO if it did this, even with reservations. Carter did this a few days later. By the time Vance got to Israel, his reception was less than warm.<sup>64</sup> Begin was highly critical of the US, both publicly and privately, for offering any deal to the PLO; and suggested that Vance's offer to talk to their representatives if the organization accepted Resolution 242 was comparable to Neville Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler. Under no circumstances would Israel talk with the PLO if they were at Geneva. If there were Palestinian Arabs in the Jordanian delegation, so be it; but if they were from the PLO then Israel could not accept this. He also ruled out the idea of a single Arab delegation at Geneva. Begin did, however, tell Vance his idea about offering "our Arab neighbors in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza full cultural autonomy" and choice of Israeli citizenship with full voting rights. The Israelis did agree to draft a treaty as well, and further meetings were scheduled in New York in conjunction with the UN General Assembly.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Current Events, "Arab States Intensify Squeeze on PLO," *MERIP Reports*, No. 55. (March 1977): 24; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 186.

<sup>65</sup> See "Press Conference by Syrian President Hafiz Al-Assad, Damascus, August 7, 1977 in "[Documents and Source Material]: Arab Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 7 (winter 1978): 170; William B. Quandt, *Camp David*, (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1986): 92. See also Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 25; see also Current Events, "PLO

*The Russians Are Coming*

In September 1977 US policy evolved further as the administration pursued four parallel goals that were potentially conflicting. The first strand was to get the parties to write draft treaties. Israel wrote a treaty, but left the questions of settlements in Sinai and borders obscure. Jordan and Syria eventually submitted a set of principles that they thought should govern any peace settlement. A significant aspect of this exercise was that it forced the players to think in concrete terms. The second thread was the effort to find a solution to the Palestinian representation issue. At one point the PLO seemed on the verge of accepting Resolution 242, with reservations, but Arafat could not deliver and it fell through. In early October Sadat informed Carter that the PLO agreed to be represented by a Palestinian who was not a member of the PLO. By then, everyone had accepted the idea of a single Arab delegation, so this point seemed to be resolved. The third center of attention was the effort to develop some sort of understanding among the parties involved about the procedures of the Geneva talks. Sadat was still committed to the notion of prior preparations in order to avoid a hopeless stalemate. He was afraid that if there were no prior understandings the other Arabs could hamper his ability to maneuver, and that the US would be subject to the omnipresent pro-Israeli pressures of US public opinion and Congress. Moshe Dayan, Israeli foreign secretary, however, thought that a unified Arab delegation was a formula for stalemate. The American position was to get everyone to accept a unified Arab delegation, and thus get the Palestinians to the table. After the opening session at Geneva, at which time the Arabs would appear to be a single delegation, the participants would break up into essentially

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Rejects US Attempt to Finesse Question of Participation in Peace Talks," *MERIP Reports* 60 (September 1977): 23.



bilateral groups, except for the discussions of the West Bank and Gaza. Both Egypt and Jordan would discuss those areas with the Israelis. The main problem seemed to be to get the Israelis to agree that the Palestinians should be at the talks in their own right, not just as part of the Jordanian or Egyptian delegations. The fourth area concerned the SU. As the conference became more concrete the US had to figure out the role of its co-chair. Some procedures had been crafted in December 1973 when the conference first met, but it was clear that the Soviets now wanted a larger role. In September 1977 they presented a draft of a joint statement to Vance, a document using the language of Resolution 242, while not specifically mentioning it by name. The only difference between it and the US position was that the Soviets referred to Palestinian “rights” whereas the US referred to Palestinian “interests.” A document was soon crafted to the satisfaction of both sides, and the only question seemed to be how and when to release this joint statement. They believed that a strong joint statement might pressure the PLO and Syria to stop haggling over procedural details and enter negotiations based on an invitation from the two superpowers. Little thought was given to Israeli reaction. They were given a draft in September and Dayan’s initial reaction was “restrained.”<sup>66</sup>

The Israeli concerns centered on several potentially troublesome elements. First, the SU would co-chair the convention; and they were clearly pro-Arab; second, Resolution 242 had not been specifically named in the communiqué; third, the convention was to meet before the end of the year; and fourth, it spoke of Palestinian *rights*. Unfortunately, the administration did not pick up any warning signals from

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Farouq Qaddoumi (‘Abu Lutf’), Head of the PLO’s Political Department [Excerpts] in “[Documents and Source Material] Arab Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,” 175. The PLO reaction was the statement “contained positive indications” regarding a solution; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 187-188.

Dayan, so when the communiqué was released on October 1, no one expected the explosion that followed, both from Israel and its American supporters. The Israelis and American Jews were “apoplectic,” accusing the administration of “betraying their basic commitments.” Neither Carter nor Vance had covered their political flanks on the issue – not having fully briefed Congress or the press, or having consulted with the American Jewish leadership. With Dayan having been given a draft on September 29, Israel had the time to inform their friends as to what was coming. The most controversial thing was not what the document said, but the fact that the Soviets had been brought on board so prominently. Neoconservatives, both Democrats and Republicans, who were both pro Israel and anti Soviet, took the opportunity to attack the administration. Liberals also attacked the statement because they believed it pressed the Israelis too hard on the Palestinian issue. From the perspective of several years, one questions what the hoopla was all about, but in October 1977 Carter was under extreme pressure from the Israelis and their American friends.<sup>67</sup> The neoconservative hype was just that – hype. According to David Korn, a member of the policy planning staff at the State Department, “The Russians caved in on just about everything we wanted because they were concerned that Sadat was going to leave them out.” Besides, Sadat was angry with Moscow. Carter understood full well that there would be some political fallout in issuing the communiqué, because it advocated legitimate Palestinian rights, and this was a step towards a Palestinian homeland. Carter acted on his principles. Believing this was in the US national interest, he saw no need for permission from either Israel or Egypt. Carter could take consolation, however, in the fact that not just the Israelis were squirming, but

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<sup>67</sup> Quandt, *Camp David*, 123; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 300-301; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 192-193; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 109-110; Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 205, 216.

Syria as well. Sadat, according to some reports, termed it a “brilliant maneuver.” By this time he had set up a secret channel to communicate with the Israelis, and he did not want the Syrians to thwart his plan to deal bi-laterally with the Israelis if necessary. He did not want to appear to be abandoning the Palestinians, however, so he was pleased that the communiqué referred to their rights as well as a call for them to be involved in the Geneva conference.<sup>68</sup> Palestinian representation at the conference was a primary concern for him. He wanted them to take some responsibility for their future and relieve Egypt from the charge of making a separate peace with Israel. Privately, Sadat sent a verbal message to Carter informing him that Arafat had agreed that the head of the Palestinian delegation in the unified Arab delegation to the conference would be Edward Said, an American professor at Columbia University of Palestinian origin<sup>69</sup>

Carter, however, backed away from the communiqué under pressure from the Israelis. As scheduled, he addressed the UN General Assembly and took the occasion to reassure Israel that there was no change in basic policy. He then met with Dayan for several hours. This was October 4, and it marks a turning point for the evolution of US policy. Domestic politics came to the front burner with unforeseen consequences. The UN speech reaffirmed the US commitment to Israeli security, saying it was “unquestionable,” with “borders that are recognized and secure,” and defined Palestinian “rights” within the broad context of his commitment to human rights. Furthermore, it was up to the parties to decide how these were to be defined.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See Ismail Fahmy, *Negotiating for Peace in the Middle East*, Fahmy was Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Egypt up to November 17, 1977; Kenneth W. Stein *Heroic Diplomacy*, 214.

<sup>69</sup> Fahmy, 252; Quandt, *Camp David*, 123-125.

<sup>70</sup> After the US backed away from the communiqué, Farouq Qaddoumi said that he did not believe any conference would be held at Geneva, see “Interview with Farouq Qaddoumi (‘Abu Luft’) in

In the meantime, Egypt and Israel already were talking directly. Dayan met with an aide to Sadat, Hassan Tuhamy, in Morocco in mid-September, at Sadat's initiative. They agreed that the US would be the prime mediator of Geneva, with the SU playing a subordinate role. Although the US was unaware of this, it added a further jolt when the US-Soviet Communiqué came out. The talks were nothing new, Israelis and Arabs had made similar contact with each other over the years. So, when the US found out, no red flag went up. Later, it seems obvious that Sadat was beginning to hedge his bets, fearing that Syria and Geneva would put him in a straightjacket. The US consistently underestimated the amount of distrust between Egypt and Syria. With so many strategies going on it was inevitable that something would go awry. The US-Soviet Communiqué was the fuse that lit the bomb. All the pent-up anxiety now exploded, fed by the neoconservative, pro-Israeli, anti-Soviet circles. What was perhaps a minor political error mushroomed into something of vast significance – something that would reestablish the SU as a major player in the Middle East. The Israelis played Carter's discomfort with amazing skill; and it resulted in an extraordinary public fight.<sup>71</sup>

### *The Road to Jerusalem*

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“[Documents and Source Material] Arab Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,” 177; Quandt, *Camp David*, 126; “United Nations: Address Before the General Assembly, October 4, 1977,” *Public Papers: Carter* available at the American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=6744&st=&st1=>. Accessed 2 June 2007.

<sup>71</sup> To read the communiqué, see *AFP*, “Joint Statement by the Secretary of State (Vance) and the Soviet Foreign Minister (Gromyko), New York, October 1, 1977.” Document 270; Interview with Farouq Qaddoumi (“Abu Lutf”) in “[Documents and Source Material] Arab Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,” 177.; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 188-189; Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 205. Some argue that unilateral action by the US that resulted from this incident as well as Sadat's suspicions of Syria, exacerbated the Cold War. See, for example, Jerome Slater, “The Superpowers and an Arab-Israeli Political Settlement: The Cold War Years,” *Political Science Quarterly* 105 (winter: 1990-1991) 557-577.

Some say that Sadat's decision to go to Jerusalem in November 1977 evolved directly out of the communiqué. The evidence on this is not overwhelming, however.<sup>72</sup> Sadat was still leery of a Geneva Conference at which actual negotiations would take place without a prearranged framework. By opening his direct channel with the Israelis he prevented the Geneva conference from becoming a Soviet-Arab trap. He seemed assured that if he signed a separate treaty with Israel, Egypt would recover most of Sinai. After Carter's speech at the UN, Sadat seemed to believe he could do nothing more than this with US help, so he went out on his own. If this is correct, then the crucial turning point in his thinking was not the communiqué, but the meeting between Carter and Dayan on October 4. Dayan had termed the communiqué as totally unacceptable, but said that Israel would go to Geneva anyway, on the basis of Resolution 242. Carter replied that Israel did not have to accept the communiqué. Dayan then asked Carter to reaffirm publicly all past US commitments to Israel, and said that if he did not then Israel might feel compelled to publish them. He also wanted a statement that the US would not pressure Israel to accept a Palestinian state. Carter did not want to make any such statements, but said that the US would not pressure Israel. Dayan then stated that he would have to say that he had asked and Carter had refused – a thinly disguised threat. The next day Dayan and Vance worked out a formula for Palestinian representation, with Dayan probably moving further to the US position than he had been authorized. Dayan also wanted to announce an agreement on Geneva between the US and Israel. This would quiet down the uproar, both in the US and Israel. Vance was nervous about this, and in the end the two sides presented a joint "working paper." Begin cabled two

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<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Martin Indyk, *To the Ends of the Earth: Sadat's Jerusalem Initiative*, (Harvard University, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1984), 41-43. See Also *AFP* "Address by the President of Egypt (Sadat) Before the Egyptian People's Assembly, November 9, 1977." Document 273.

reservations to the agreement the next morning, which was “particularly annoying” to Dayan. The Arabs interpreted it as a retreat in the face of the power of Israel and its American lobby.<sup>73</sup>

Later in October, with his patience running thin, Carter sent a handwritten note to Sadat, urging him to act boldly. The time had come because of the impasse between Egypt and Syria over forming a joint Arab delegation. Sadat responded within the week. His idea was to convene a super-Geneva conference in Jerusalem, and the attendees would be the heads of state of the permanent members of the Security Council, as well as the leaders of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Israel, and the PLO. Carter was cool to the flamboyant venture. Sadat began planning a solo plan about Jerusalem, and this time he did not tell Carter. He sought the advice of several foreign leaders, including President Ceausescu of Rumania, the Shah of Iran, and King Khalid of Saudi Arabia. He confided to Ceausescu that he wanted to test Israeli intentions directly. When his intention to visit Jerusalem was publicly revealed on November 9, Washington was again caught off guard, and once again it had to adjust its policy because events in the Middle East were beyond its control. Sadat had revolutionized Middle East diplomacy. Official Washington admired Sadat for his courage, but wondered what his next step would be, given Begin’s intransigence on the Palestinian issue and the negative Arab reaction. Begin’s first reaction was disbelief, but Sadat reiterated his commitment in an interview with Walter Cronkite of CBS. He soon got a formal invitation. When he addressed the

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<sup>73</sup>See Mitchell Geoffrey Bard, *The Water’s Edge and Beyond: Defining the Limits to Domestic Influence on United States Middle East Policy*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1991.) See also Views from Abroad “Balance in the Press,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 9 (autumn 1979): 184-186; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 189-90; Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 70-71; Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 218, 219; see also Paul Findley, *They Dare to Speak Out: People and Institutions Confront Israel’s Lobby*, (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1985.)

Israeli Knesset on November 19, it was broadcast to an audience of millions. He and Begin granted joint interviews to the American press, he was seen shaking hands with Israel's leaders, exchanging gifts with Golda Meir, and visiting Israel's memorial to the Holocaust victims. Meir characterized his visit "as if the Messiah had almost arrived." He most certainly had extended an olive branch to Israel. Carter praised both men, saying that "If any two leaders on earth have the strength and the determination and the courage to make progress toward peace in the most difficult region that I have ever known, it is Prime Minister Begin and President Sadat."<sup>74</sup>

#### *Towards a Separate Egyptian-Israeli Peace*

By December, a consensus had formed in the administration that it should strongly support Sadat and his efforts, but also that the US should continue to push for as broad a peace as possible. Its policy would focus on some sort of West Bank, Gaza accord and would fundamentally ignore Syria for the most part and the PLO as well. Vance went to the Middle East, visiting various leaders and trying to redefine American strategy. He told Begin that Egypt would sign a separate peace with Israel as long as it was accompanied by a "declaration of principles" on the Palestinian problem and defined an approach to negotiations with other Arab states. This was the hypothetical basis for Camp David.<sup>75</sup>

Shortly after Vance's return, Begin invited himself to Washington to see Carter. Vance had just seen him a few days before, and no new ideas were presented, but Begin

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<sup>74</sup> Don Richardson, ed., *Conversations With Carter*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner publishers) "Interview with the President," December 28, 1977; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 191-192; Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 341; Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 222-227; speech by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to the Israeli Knesset, November 20, 1977, in "[Documents and Source Material]: Arab Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," 186-194, Document 10 (a).

<sup>75</sup> Vance *Hard Choices*, 210; see also Sheehan, "It Changes, It Changes Not," 177-178.

said he had proposals to discuss with the president before he met with Sadat in Ismailia on Christmas day. Some in the administration thought Begin's purpose was to try to get a US endorsement of his ideas prior to sharing them with Sadat. This was exactly the case, and it shows the amount of power the US still had over the peace process. Carter told him that the Sinai suggestion looked promising, but added the reservation that there could be parts he did not fully understand. This became a source of friction because the Israelis said that Carter had approved the proposal even though it stipulated that Israeli settlements would not be removed. Begin also proposed that the people in the West Bank and Gaza establish "administrative autonomy," hold their own council elections, and choose between Israeli or Jordanian citizenship. The issue of sovereignty would be left open. Begin was strongly encouraged by the administration to modify his plan. There were several problems. First, the proposal was intended to be permanent and this meant that those territories would not revert to Arab rule. Second, the plan contained a level of detail that would annoy Sadat. Begin did not want to alter his plan, but he was eager to win US approval. In spite of saying he did not need US approval on how to negotiate with Sadat, he did imply that he would consult with his cabinet and make modifications. However, he promptly and publicly made a statement that came very close to saying the US had approved of his ideas, which required a clarification on the part of the US.<sup>76</sup>

There were both positive and negative elements in Begin's proposals. One of the positives was the willingness to set aside Israel's claim of sovereignty over the West Bank and Gaza for five years; the idea that a special administrative regime could be put into place in those territories; and his suggestions on equal rights and responsibilities for

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<sup>76</sup> David G. Nes, "Egypt Breaks the Deadlock," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 7, (winter 1978): 62; From the Israeli Press, "Towards a Political Settlement," 136; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 193. Compare Quandt to Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 342-343.



Arabs and Israelis. However, some of the most positive points were dropped prior to his meeting with Sadat. The two men gave different accounts of that meeting. According to the Israeli story, Sadat was ready to accept the proposals and issue a common declaration of principles, but was stopped by hard-liners in his Foreign Ministry. Sadat, for his part, said Begin had not grasped the importance of his trip to Jerusalem, and was haggling over sovereignty. His caustic tone indicated there was little else to talk about. The two men decided to convene a military committee in Cairo and a political committee in Jerusalem to move the talks forward.<sup>77</sup> Carter and Vance believed that there needed to be on-going negotiations for the US to use its influence and if there was to be progress. A meeting of the political committee, at the foreign minister level, was set for January. Sadat's new foreign minister was Mohamad Ibrahim Kamel, and he made his first trip to Jerusalem. The objective as stated by the US was a formula calling for "the right of the Palestinians to participate in the determination of their own future." But Sadat, abruptly called his delegation home, perhaps because of Kamel's anger at a toast given by Begin at dinner on the first night, but this is not altogether clear. Vance went home to try to forge a new approach.<sup>78</sup> Sadat and Begin would not meet again until Camp David.

Immediately after the meeting at Ismailia with Sadat, Begin allowed new settlements in the territories, so the US decided that it was critical to get him to agree to a freeze. Carter and his advisers cooked up a scheme, along with Sadat, to do this. The administration developed a nine-point document which outlined a series of general principles that, hopefully, the Egyptians and Israelis could agree on as a foundation for

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<sup>77</sup> For additional background to the lead-up to Camp David see Haynes Johnson, *In the Absence of Power*, 265-272; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 193. Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 343.

<sup>78</sup> See Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel, *The Camp David Accords: A Testimony by Sadat's Foreign Minister*, (New York: Methuen, 1986) for a discussion of his disagreements with Sadat; Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 246-247.

negotiations. Sadat was to prepare a hard proposal of his own, present it to Begin (who was sure to reject it), then Carter could step in with the nine-point plan. That way, he could argue with both sides, which would protect his flank at home. Sadat was to moderate his stance first and accept the American proposals, which would put Begin on the spot. Sadat loved it.<sup>79</sup>

### *The Best Laid Plans*

The plan went awry, however. The calendar, which aimed for an American proposal by mid year, was thrown off by the battle in Congress of selling advanced aircraft to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. The sale of the F15s for Saudi Arabia proved to be exceedingly controversial, and Carter and his team spent an enormous amount of political capital and time to get it through. As expected, the Israeli lobby objected strenuously. Since the Kissinger initiative toward Egypt in the mid-seventies, the US had a growing security stake there, and the economic importance of Saudi Arabia to the US commanded close security ties. Both Saudi and Egyptian pressure induced the administration in mid-February to announce the sale. Brzezinski relates that there was some indication that if the US would not make the planes available, the Saudis would turn to the French for the equipment, at the expense of the US. The proposed sale was presented as one package, and the administration made it known that it would not allow the omission of any one country by a congressional veto. This was designed to paralyze the Israeli lobby, which put enormous pressure on the administration as well as on Congress. Brzezinski tells that he urged the president not to give more planes to the

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<sup>79</sup> Shibley Telhami, *Power and Leadership in International Bargaining* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 163; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 340; Saadia Touval, *The Peace Brokers: Mediators in the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1979* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 296-297.

Saudis and Egyptians together than to the Israelis, but Carter decided to increase the number of planes to Egypt to 50. This was probably because of his irritation with Begin's position on the settlements in the occupied territories as well as his relationship with Sadat. The administration worked hard to get Congress on board and was moderately successful, except for Senator Frank Church, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In any case, the sale went through in May, albeit by a small margin of votes. The entire issue delayed progress on other fronts, including the Arab-Israeli situation.<sup>80</sup>

In mid-March, in the meantime, there were major developments in the Middle East which affected the diplomacy. Following a civil war, Lebanon found the southern part of the country trapped in a web of rival Palestinian groups, Israeli proxies, and Israel itself which often acted in concert with Maronite politicians and paramilitary groups. In mid-March, 1978 Israel invaded south Lebanon because of increased PLO terrorist attacks emanating, according to some, from the region. Begin sent Carter a letter informing him that the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) were moving into southern Lebanon to destroy PLO bases and that his arrival in Washington would be delayed. The Israeli attack was a massive one that brought most of Lebanon south of the Litani River under temporary Israeli control. It gave Israel the chance to establish a buffer zone held by Christian militiamen under the command of Major Saad Haddad along their border. This, however, did not solve the problem of the PLO in Lebanon, which became more and more tied to Palestinian sentiment on the West Bank. This bolstered the prestige of Yasir

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<sup>80</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 247-249; *Quant Peace Process*. 195-196; Vance *Hard Choices*, 205; Elaine P. Adam, ed., *American Foreign Relations 1978*, Documents on American Foreign Relations The United States in World Affairs Series (New York: New York University Press, 1979) "Notification to Congress: Remarks by Secretary of State Vance, April 28, 1978," 273, (hereinafter cited as *AFR 1978*).

Arafat; he seemed to be the only one who understood the frustration of the Palestinian people.<sup>81</sup> Israel technically withdrew after intense efforts on the part of the UN Security Council, although it continued to support the Christian militia. Then, in April, in response to congressional inquiries, Vance sent a letter to Congress informing it that Israel's use of American military equipment in its invasion of Lebanon *may* have violated the Arms Export Control Act (AECA). This act stipulates that arms transfers from the US may be used only for defensive purposes. If the letter said that the violation *had* occurred, the President could have suspended all military assistance to Israel. The US did protest Israel's "use of cluster bombs... in violation of its agreement with the United States to use this antipersonnel weapon only when attacked and only against military targets" Israel's Defense Minister, Ezer Weizman, admitted that this had been a mistake. The administration was very careful and conservative in its accusation, not wanting to provoke a counter-crisis, especially since Israel seemed to be withdrawing from Lebanon. Later, in June, the US received information that it had left behind, with Haddad, some armored personnel carriers and artillery pieces. If this were true, it would be a blatant violation of the AECA. The Israelis flatly denied this, but it seems to be true nonetheless.<sup>82</sup>

A few pieces of US military equipment might be a small thing, but the *principle* involved was huge. Carter sent a "terse, blunt message to Begin" telling him that if the equipment were not removed at once, he would inform congress immediately that Israel had violated the AECA. The letter went to Begin, not the Israeli government, so that he

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<sup>81</sup> Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 342; Vance *Hard Choices*, 208. See Mohamed Kamel's account of the actual attack in which a group of Palestinian commandos, using rubber boats, landed on the Israeli coast near Haifa.

<sup>82</sup> Views from Abroad, "Arms and the Israel Lobby," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 7 (summer 1978): 171-175; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 208-209.

could act quietly, if he wished to do so. This was certainly an attempt to allow Begin to reconsider without embarrassment, a favor which was not returned. Begin removed the equipment immediately.<sup>83</sup> Carter was very effective in using US power to uphold a basic principle.

The PLO attack against Israel changed the atmosphere of the peace talks. It strengthened Begin's position and refocused the American Israeli lobby on security rather than the peace process. Begin visited Washington on March 21-22 and the discussions were confrontational. Vance relates that Carter was frustrated over the "semantics" engaged in by both sides. Talks ended on the first day when Carter bluntly said that, "in his opinion, the obstacle for peace was Israel's obvious intention to retain perpetual control over the West Bank." Carter felt that the opportunity for peace was slipping away. Dayan had accompanied Begin and had spent time talking with Vance, and presented the same hard line. Carter decided it was time to either fish or cut bait. Unless Begin changed his position he was becoming an "insurmountable obstacle to further progress." Carter began to inform congressional leaders of the status of the talks, and some of them subsequently met with Begin and confirmed what had been labeled Israel's "six no's." No withdrawal from the West Bank; no stopping new settlements or the expansion of existing ones; no withdrawal of Israeli settlers from Sinai, no acknowledgement that Resolution 242 applied to the West-Bank-Gaza areas, and no willingness to grant the Palestinian Arabs real authority.<sup>84</sup>

Next, Sadat was shaky in carrying out his part of the plan. In his public statements he made it seem that the US was more pro-Arab than it was. His proposal,

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<sup>83</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 209.

<sup>84</sup> Vance *Hard Choices*, 209; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 319-320.

when it same, was too general to be of much use. By mid-June the administration had devised an alternate set of proposals. In July, however, Fritz Mondale, on returning from the Middle East, began to question the very public diplomacy of the administration. According to Brzezinski, he proposed a return to the Kissinger style of shuttle diplomacy and even suggested Kissinger be appointed to negotiate the issues. Brzezinski discussed this with Vance who told him that he “would resign if the President even considered it.”<sup>85</sup>

By midsummer no one felt that the plan would work, but Carter and Vance remained committed to the idea of a US proposal. As the Americans gradually moved away from the US-Egyptian strategy, Sadat seemed to be trying to foment the crisis into which Carter could step with the US proposal. The summer wore on with endless meetings and no real progress. Then, in July American, Egyptian, and Israeli foreign ministers met at Leeds Castle in Kent, England, which helped to lay the groundwork for the meeting at Camp David two months later. A highly secret plan was developed under the direction of Vance. Carter subsequently proposed a summit at Camp David. His advisors were leery at first of the idea, but once the leaders committed themselves, they could not afford to fail. Neither could they afford to let the negotiations deadlock, which could possibly lead to another war and another oil embargo. Camp David was secluded from both the press and the everyday business of governing.<sup>86</sup> Carter had spent enormous political capital on both the arms transfer legislation and the Panama Canal Treaties, two successful policies that were perceived negatively by much of the electorate. An agreement on the Middle East would strengthen his standing. And the

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<sup>85</sup> “Mr Sadat Parades His Weakness,” *New York Times* June 9, 1978; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 249.

<sup>86</sup> Saadia Touval, *The Peace Brokers*, 297; Some argue that the Leeds conference was a failure. See Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov *Israel and the Peace Process 1977-1982*; Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 250; see also Robert A. Strong, *Working in the World*, 186-189..

outer limits of that agreement would be defined by what Begin was willing to accept. He knew that both Sadat and Begin wanted an agreement on Sinai, and Carter wanted to facilitate it. This could possibly help to mitigate the negative domestic political climate. If he failed, it would be a disaster. An agreement, however, was worth the risk.<sup>87</sup> Vance was dispatched to the Middle East to invite the two men to Camp David in September. Both accepted.

### *The Camp David Summit*

Carter did not believe that the gap was too wide to bridge between Egypt and Israel. He thought that if the two men could meet in a quiet setting and get to know each other, they would find a common interest in peace. Carter was undoubtedly influenced by the biblical history of the Middle East, seeing Abraham as the common father of three great monotheistic religions. This, plus his strong beliefs about the rights as well as the ties of humanity itself most likely convinced him that peace had a chance.

Carter's basic intent was in achieving an Egyptian-Israeli accord and the summit would be a crucial test of whether Carter could persuade Begin to make some concessions. Carter read Sadat correctly, believing that his top priority was regaining Egyptian land, and would not be insistent on very much for the Palestinians. His advisors did not see it that way, however. In any case, Sadat still wanted the US as an arbiter and, at the least, to present its own plan.. That is, he and Carter would coordinate their

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<sup>87</sup> Saadia Touval, *The Peace Brokers*, 298; Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel and the Peace Process 1977-1982*, 112-113.

positions and he would help Carter manage Begin. Sadat, evidently, told the Americans that he wanted a US-Egyptian agreement more than an Israeli-Egyptian agreement.<sup>88</sup>

Begin came to the talks politically stronger than either Sadat or Carter. His militant supporters would back him no matter if there was success or failure. Not so with Carter and Sadat. Begin's only fear was that Carter would blame him publicly for any failure and turn American public opinion against him. Carter, however, repeatedly assured him that he would never threaten to cut military or economic aid to Israel as a way to pressure it, and he also assured the parties involved that the Americans would not impose their own plan. Everyone brought their own world view, a personal style, a gaggle of advisors and a strategy. The key players were a Jew, a Muslim, and a Christian, all devout in their beliefs. Both Sadat and Begin wanted Carter to side with them, so this put Carter into a pivotal position.<sup>89</sup>

Vance and his subordinates concluded that there would be an inevitable clash between Sadat and Begin over territory, and thus the success or failure of the meeting would hinge on how this was handled. Sinai did not seem to be an insurmountable issue, although they underestimated just how tenaciously Begin would try to hold on to Israeli settlements there. The three most complicated issues would be the West Bank, Gaza, and the Palestinians. The working group believed that Sadat would try to exchange major Egyptian political and security concessions for Begin's commitment to withdrawal from occupied territories. Sadat was sensitive to the charge of selling out the Palestinians and

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<sup>88</sup> See, for example Muhammad Ibrahim Kamel, *The Camp David Accords*, (London) 327-328 and 332 where Sadat refused to withdraw from the discussions despite Begin's insistence that no settlements would be demolished.

<sup>89</sup> Kamel, *The Camp David Accords* (London), 327-328; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 337; Quandt, *Camp David*, 206-208. Compare this to Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 252 who says that neither Begin nor Sadat wanted failure because they believed that they would be blamed. They would disappoint the United States president, with chilly receptions from the White House sure to follow. The prize for succeeding was much greater than the prize for failing. .



the Arab cause, and was therefore eager to link any bi-lateral agreement with Egypt to the Palestinian issue. He backed away from this when he found little American support. He and Carter were worn down by Begin's intransigence on Israel's claim to the West Bank. With no linkage to the Palestinians Sadat could refuse to negotiate, or if a bilateral agreement was reached, he could find himself isolated in the Arab world which would slow the peace process for years to come. Complete linkage, however, could stalemate the talks, as they had done in the fall of 1977. Somewhere in between there might be a middle ground. The American team thought in terms of seeking an agreement on general principles, but Carter wanted more. He wanted to work out the details of a peace treaty, including security arrangements. This became his primary project, and he was less concerned with linkage than the rest of the team. He ended up being correct in that the best approach lay in getting a detailed understanding between Begin and Sadat on a peace treaty; but he was mistaken when he thought the talks could be finished quickly and that the three men could work well together. After two sessions with both Begin and Sadat in the room, Carter concluded it would be better to separate them. The crucial day was Saturday, September 16, for addressing the vital issues of the West Bank and Gaza. Until then, all the US drafts contained the language of Resolution 242, including withdrawal; and a paragraph on freezing settlements was also always included. That morning Dayan and Aharon Barak, the Israeli Attorney General, met with Vance and told him why Begin would not accept the language of Resolution 242. Barak said he was sure a solution could be found, but only if they were all willing to negotiate another week.<sup>90</sup> Otherwise,

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<sup>90</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 45; Saadia Touval, *The Peace Brokers*, 299; Quandt, *Camp David*, 210-214; Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 228; No one wanted to be at Camp David any longer, with the endless haggling. Boutros Boutros-Ghali said that "As the days went by, Camp David

in order to reach an agreement that day they would be papering over issues that would become major problems later. No one except Barak and a few others could tolerate the stifling atmosphere at Camp David for another week, and that day the American draft fundamentally changed. The draft made it clear that the negotiations, but not necessarily the results, would be based on the principles of Resolution 242. Two issues emerged: one was that Israel would pursue a peace treaty with Jordan; the second was concerned negotiations the West Bank and Gaza. Both concerned the PLO. Begin was successful in claiming that Resolution 242 did not pertain to negotiations over the West Bank's future. Later, Carter insisted that Begin agree to freeze settlements in the West Bank and Gaza while negotiating over autonomy. Carter agreed to accept a letter from Begin to this effect. He clearly thought that Begin had made a commitment not to build new settlements during the negotiations over autonomy. The draft of the letter came to Carter the next day, and it linked the freeze to the Egyptian-Israeli negotiations, *or three months, not to the autonomy talks*. Carter sent the letter back, and he and Vance acted as if it were merely a misunderstanding that would soon be cleared up. Carter believed their verbal agreement would be honored. But the final letter arrived after the accords had been signed, and Begin kept to the three-month timetable. Carter felt that Begin had betrayed him, and this led to deep mutual distrust. This was of great importance to the Arab audience waiting to see what the Palestinians would get, which was little indeed.<sup>91</sup>

The document contained two agreements and was signed on September 17, 1978 by Sadat and Begin and was witnessed by Carter. The preamble mentioned Resolution

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seemed more and more like a prison camp." Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem*, (New York: Random House, 1997), 139.

<sup>91</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Peace, Not Apartheid*, 50; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 198-203. For a more detailed and intricate discussion see Quandt, *Camp David*, 237-254; Strong, *Working in the World*, 188.

242 by name but did not say that it applied to all fronts. The first agreement stated general principles and outlined a process for dealing with the West Bank and Gaza. The second, tied loosely to the general principles in the first, set out a detailed formula for an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Each party felt they had achieved something for their efforts, in spite of the vagueness of much of them. The framework for subsequent negotiations was now set.<sup>92</sup>

Carter's role in the agreements was central. With his bedrock belief in human rights and the ability of mankind to act rationally, he believed that an agreement could be reached, in spite of naysayers and in spite of Begin and Sadat. The Accords were signed by Sadat and Begin and officially ratified by their respective governments. In addition to an agreement on Sinai, they reconfirmed a commitment to honor UN Resolution 242 and 338, prescribed full autonomy for occupants of the occupied territories, withdrawal of Israeli military and civilian forces from the West Bank and Gaza, and recognized the Palestinians as a separate political entity with a right to determine their own future. The Accords specify that the Palestinians are to participate as equals in further negotiations, and the final status of the West Bank and Gaza are to be submitted "to a vote by the elected representatives of the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza. Both Begin and Sadat agreed that these overwhelming problems would be overcome. The agreement was not perfect, but it was a huge step towards peace in the region. In any event, it was Carter who judged, finally, what to accept and what to let go, and it was Carter who used his influence on Sadat to get him to sign an agreement that both knew was flawed. Because

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<sup>92</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Peace, Not Apartheid*, 48-50 and Appendix 3 and 4; Kamel was disappointed with the outcome on the Egyptian side, and resigned as foreign minister.

of his faith that an agreement could be reached, and his determination to facilitate it, the Accords were signed. Camp David, however, was not the end of the road.<sup>93</sup>

### *The Aftermath*

To keep the momentum going, Carter needed to get a signed treaty soon, especially in light of the mid-term elections coming in November 1978. Arab opposition was strong, and might grow even stronger if there was a significant delay. Begin and Sadat, however, faced formidable political problems, and Begin saw that in was in his interests to slow the process down so that less pressure would be placed on Israel. He was particularly intransigent on the issue of settlements in the territories. Early peace meant that the Palestinian issue would move to the front burner. As a result, he almost immediately began to publicly backpedal on the settlements issue. Fundamentally, he turned what the US thought was a major concession into a minor gesture. It was weakened further when Israel announced it would “thicken” existing settlements prior to the finalization of the peace treaty. It was a harbinger of things to come. Begin also understood that the linkage between the peace treaty and a self governing Palestinian authority would resurface. “Full autonomy” also gave Begin trouble because many thought this implied the eventual creation of a Palestinian state.<sup>94</sup>

Sadat was not nearly concerned about his domestic constituency, but was very worried about Arab opinion. While he could not be criticized for regaining Sinai, he knew he could be accused of selling out the Palestinians. Even the freeze on settlements

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<sup>93</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Peace Not Apartheid*, 48-50 and Appendix 4. See also John Norton Moore, ed., *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, vol. 4: “The Difficult Search for Peace (1975-1988),” Part One, “A Framework for Peace in the Middle East Agreed at Camp David, September 17, 1978,” (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 307-312; Strong, *Working in the World*, 186-187.

<sup>94</sup> Strong, *Working in the World*, 188-189; see also Progressive Assembly of National Unionists “No to the Egyptian-Israeli Treaty,” *MERIP Reports* 80 (September 1979): 14-18

seemed to vanish within days of Camp David. His foreign minister resigned in protest and others within the ministry refused to attend the signing ceremony at the White House. He could not however, allow the talks to break down because Israel was still in Sinai and could stay put. Plus, his desire for American aid would fall through the cracks if he were seen as an obstructionist. Sadat was also determined that his pursuit of the Egyptian interests would go along with progress towards Palestinian self-determination.

Unfortunately, some interpret the Accords as leaving out the Palestinians entirely.<sup>95</sup>

In the meantime, the Israeli Knesset was to vote on the accords within two weeks, but Carter was not satisfied just to sit and wait. There was still a piece of unfinished business. On Monday, September 18, 1978 Begin had sent the letter on the settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. It was unchanged from the day before. Carter refused to accept it. After reviewing his notes, he wrote down what he thought had been agreed to and sent Assistant Secretary of State Harold Saunders to deliver his version to the Israelis, along with the original of Begin's letter. Begin insisted that he had not promised a freeze on settlements, only that he would consider it. Neither Carter nor Begin budged, and Carter believed that a trust had been betrayed. In the eyes of the Arabs, this round went to Begin, and when Vance went to the Middle East to drum up Jordanian and Saudi support, he was received with chilly formality. Making matters worse, Sadat had no interest in talking with either the Saudis or Jordanians. In spite of this, Carter remained optimistic, while Vance became pessimistic. King Hussein of Jordan had raised several questions and The PLO also made inquiries. The administration hoped that they would

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<sup>95</sup> See his speech before the Israeli Knesset November 20, 1977 in "[Documents and Source Material]: Arab Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,"; Quandt, *Camp David*, 263; see also Moshe Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 176; Robert O. Freedman, ed., *The Middle East Since Camp David*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984).

interpret the framework favorably in spite of Begin's public remarks. In the meantime, the Knesset approved of the accords. When Carter telephoned Begin to congratulate him he also mentioned that he hoped the disagreement over settlements could be resolved quickly. He then ended the public debate on the issue for fear that it would endanger the Sinai agreement, which Sadat needed badly. Dwelling on it would simply keep reminding the Arabs of the flaws in the agreement. In the meantime, there was still the three month freeze. On the same day as the telephone conversations, September 28, he authorized Harold Brown, defense secretary, to sign a letter to the Israeli defense minister, Ezer Weizman, supporting Israel in building two airfields in the Negev.<sup>96</sup>

#### *The Next Phase – Blair House Talks*

The American team drew up a draft of an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, hoping to capitalize again on the process used so successfully at Camp David. Each side would comment on it, but changes would be made only by the Americans after consulting with the others. Carter review the draft on October 9, and his only comment was that Israel should withdraw from Sinai within two years, not three. It was a fairly simple document which called for Israel to withdraw to the international boundary in accordance with details to be worked out by the two parties. That boundary was defined as the former border between Egypt and mandated Palestine. Normal peaceful relations were to be established, again with the details to be worked out. Security on the border as well as in Sinai would be worked out, and freedom of navigation was addressed. When an interim phase of the withdrawal was complete, diplomatic relations would be established.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process* 208-209.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

There were several contentious issues that the US recognized from the beginning. For Israel it would be the Sinai withdrawal and the exchange of ambassadors. If they withdrew prior to an agreement on peaceful relations, it would seem that Israel was making all the concessions. Israel insisted on diplomatic relations prior to the full return of Sinai. This, in turn, presented a problem for Egypt. Sadat wanted to delay the treaty until the Camp David Accords were carried out. This meant that elections for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza should establish their self governing authority. This was the linkage issue and it now boiled down to when Egypt would post an ambassador in Israel. This was very important to Begin, and thus it became very important to Sadat. Another issue confounding the treaty was that Israel wanted Egypt to forego its other agreements with the Arabs, especially the mutual defense treaties. Sadat found it repugnant that he would have to say publicly that commitments to Israel counted for more than those to fellow Arabs. This was the so-called "priority of obligations." These issues had very high symbolic value and demonstrated the level of distrust still present between the two men, which was perhaps the most contentious thing in the negotiations. The Palestinian issue was probably the thorniest. How were the two countries to express their commitment to further negotiations to solve the problem? Begin preferred vagueness, while Sadat wanted deadlines and details in order to assure the Arab world that he had not abandoned the Palestinians and signed a separate peace. Also, Israel wanted continued access to Sinai oil and some form of a US guarantee of that if Egypt reneged Vance was designated the principle negotiator this time because Carter had to turn his attention to the normalization of relations with China and the proposed SALT II treaty with the Soviets The delegations met in Washington officially October 12.

In preliminary talks with the Egyptians on October 11, the issue of linkage arose once again. The Palestinians needed attention *now*, because after the treaty was signed there would be no incentive on Israeli's part to deal with the issue. Besides, if that were not addressed Sadat would be isolated in the Arab world. Carter repeated that he was eager to find a solution to the West Bank and Gaza, but he did not want the treaty to be derailed because of problems with either Jordan or the Palestinians.<sup>98</sup>

The talks made little progress on the political issues at first, but did move ahead on the technical annexes to the treaty. Then Dayan announced with Israel would be willing to accelerate its withdrawal from Sinai to the interim line as identified by the Camp David Accords. Al-Arish could be returned to Egypt within two months instead of the nine months envisioned in the framework. Carter informed the Egyptians about this and urged the Egyptians to agree to the exchange of Ambassadors sooner rather than later. He was now back in the thick of the negotiations. A draft treaty was hammered out, but the West Bank and Gaza continued to befuddle everyone. Israel wanted a treaty that would be operative regardless of what happened in the West Bank and Gaza. Sadat wanted a parallel letter to be signed by Egypt and Israel dealing with the two areas. Egypt also wanted a "Gaza first" option. That is, self government would be established there first. The West Bank would come later, after Hussein joined the negotiations. The draft of the treaty went to Sadat and Begin in spite of the problems. It got considerable support in Israel, but this is when Begin said that Israel would "thicken" settlements in the West Bank. Carter was furious, and told Begin that "taking this step at this time will have the most serious consequences for our relationship." The next day both Sadat and Begin both were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, an ironic twist to say the least, since

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<sup>98</sup> Strong, *Working in the World*, 190-192; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 210, 211.



peace seemed more fleeting. In the meantime the Americans also became aware that “autonomy” for the Palestinians was to be very narrowly defined. Dayan said that Israel did not want to negotiate “powers and responsibilities” because this could take years. He wanted to negotiate only how the elections were to be carried out. The Egyptians disagreed. To Carter, it seemed as if the Israelis were backsliding. Consulting with his top advisors, the administration decided to slow down the negotiations, review the Israeli commitments in the accords, and develop steps to pressure Begin. For example, arms transfers to Israel could be slowed down.<sup>99</sup> Carter’s patience with the entire thing seemed bottomless.

The next day Vance met with Begin in New York. Begin did not want any definite date for the elections because if something went wrong outside of Egypt’s or Israel’s control the entire treaty could be called into question. He did agree that the “powers and responsibilities” could be defined in advance of the elections. Begin then told Vance he would need \$3.37 billion in aid for the withdrawal from Sinai and the dismantlement of the settlements. The cabinet’s approval of the treaty depended on it.

In addition to this tension between Israel and the US, Egypt was coming under increasing pressure from the Arabs to withdraw from the treaty negotiations. A meeting was convened in Baghdad on November 5 to this effect, but Sadat said he would have none of it. Within days, however, the Egyptian position seemed to harden, with Sadat telling Carter that a definitive agreement on the West Bank and Gaza had to take place. The administration constructed another draft treaty with annexes and a letter on the West

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<sup>99</sup> Strong, *Working in the World*, 190; “Down to the Last 2%,” *Time*, October 16, 1978; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 212-216.

Bank and Gaza. Begin refused to accept a target date and accelerated withdrawal. Then he demanded that the aid he had requested be in the form of a grant, not a loan.<sup>100</sup>

### *Sadat Holds Firm*

Carter asked Sadat to accept the draft, but Sadat was adamant that the Baghdad “rejectionists” should not get the upper hand; that he *must* show that he had gotten something for the Palestinians, even if was just Gaza. Carter then called Begin in New York and said the possibility of an agreement was remote. Begin reacted by saying that Israel had broken no promises by refusing to accelerate the withdrawal, and that Weizman never should have agreed to such a thing. Several days later Begin telephoned to say that the cabinet had accepted the treaty, but had rejected the idea of a target date at the end of 1979 (the date the letter had asked for) for the elections. And there were other problems as well, he continued. The grant was one and assurances on oil were another, especially in light of the turmoil in Iran at the time, the place where Israel usually got its oil. Sadat had numerous objections to the whole thing by now, including priority of obligations. Carter suggested interpretative notes be added on that point, rather than revising the treaty. Carter was convinced that Sadat would insist on some link between the Sinai agreement and the elections in the occupied territories. Brzezinski told the president that if the peace initiative failed, it could open the Middle East to Soviet penetration. He urged a strong stance. Carter sent Vance to the region and told him to lean hard on the Israelis, even if this might end up costing him the election and Jewish support.<sup>101</sup> Carter seemed willing to risk his political future in the cause of peace.

### *Vance Travels Again*

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<sup>100</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, 217-218.

<sup>101</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 276.

Vance set out for the Middle East once again, and he had one new idea – originated by Carter. The Camp David Accords said that after the interim withdrawal from Sinai, diplomatic relations would be established; it did not specify when ambassadors would be exchanged. Carter thought that Sadat would be justified if he would establish diplomatic relations, not exchange ambassadors until the self governing authority in the territories had been established. Sadat, as anticipated, was pleased. He also showed some flexibility about accepting a target date instead of a fixed date for the elections. More details were worked out and Sadat said that he would make no more concessions. Begin, also as anticipated, was angry, and did little to hide it. He did not like anything – no target date, no interpretative notes, no delay on the exchange of ambassadors, no special role for Egypt in Gaza. Although privately Dayan tried to smooth things over, he clearly was not speaking for Begin. Vance had to leave for Washington earlier than anticipated because the normalization of relations with China was soon to be announced, and Carter wanted him home for the occasion. He had only time for a quick stop in Cairo to tell Sadat about Begin's angry reaction. Sadat was happy. On his way home Vance received the news that the Israeli cabinet had issued the following statement: The Government of Israel rejects the attitude and the interpretations of the US government with regard to the Egyptian proposals." Now Vance was angry, and he told the press that "it was the government of Israel that had prevented us from meeting the December 17 deadline."<sup>102</sup> These were very strong words in light of the strength of the Israeli lobby in the United States.

### *Return to Camp David*

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<sup>102</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 242; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 278; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 222

By the end of 1978 the prospects for peace in the Middle East seemed remote. Iran was now in turmoil and no one seemed to know what to do about it.<sup>103</sup> The strategic balance of power was changing in the Middle East, and the positions in the Egyptian-Israeli negotiations seemed to be hardening. Oil became a major issue for Israel in light of Iran, and Begin insisted that the treaty had to be independent of any commitments involving the Palestinians. Egypt's role as a stabilizing influence increased as Iran's decreased. The domestic political clock and Iran shaped the role of the US in the final stages of the negotiations. As US elections drew nearer US leverage over Israel declined. Carter then invited Dayan, Mustafa Khalil, a relatively new Egyptian prime minister, to meet with Vance at Camp David. It seemed obvious though that eventually Carter would have to meet with Begin and Sadat. Brzezinski told the president that Israel seemed to want a separate peace but did not want to see Carter reelected. Carter needed the treaty because this was going to be his only foreign policy success as the elections drew near. Carter and Begin met once again on March 2, 1979. Begin argued that the US should help Israel because that was the only thing blocking a Soviet takeover of the Middle East! He even offered the US an airbase in Sinai (which he had already promised to return to Egypt) to help prevent a communist takeover of Saudi Arabia. Carter paid little attention. Begin presented the usual no's and the session was not effective. The president decided that he wanted to go to the Middle East himself, in a dramatic make or break gesture. Sadat, however, threatened to steal the show. He sent a message that he was planning on coming to Washington to denounce Begin's intransigence. This gave some impetus to solve some of the outstanding problems.

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<sup>103</sup> See Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran* (New York: Random House, 1985), 130-140.

Begin agreed to minor changes in the wording of article 6, the priority of obligations clause, and also said that the cabinet would consider the target date for concluding the negotiations on autonomy. The two problems of oil and the timing on the exchange of ambassadors remained, but Carter assured Begin that he would deal with Sadat to find an answer. It seems that the minor changes satisfied Begin enough to overcome his suspicions of the US. It was time to make the deal with Egypt. On March 5 the Israeli cabinet approved all the changes. The time also seemed ripe for Carter to visit the Middle East himself. He contacted Sadat and asked him to make no further public pronouncements and also not to come to Washington – Carter planned on coming to the Middle East. Carter sent Brzezinski to Cairo for a broad strategic review with Sadat and, according to Brzezinski, to tell Sadat that the president's domestic political position was becoming more precarious and that Begin might even want to see him defeated. Carter denies ever saying any such thing.<sup>104</sup>

Carter arrived in Cairo on March 7, 1979. He seemingly got assurances from Sadat that he would do everything to make the trip a success. By the time Carter left for Israel he was sure he had Sadat's proxy in hand. Carter arrived in Jerusalem for a private dinner with Begin on March 10. Begin informed him that there was no chance for the treaty to be signed while Carter was in the Middle East. Carter was furious. The talks again centered on article 6 and the letter on Gaza and the West Bank, and Begin even objected to the language of "West Bank," giving the president yet another geography lesson. Eventually the dispute over the language in article 6 was resolved, but only after the president assured Begin that Israel and the US were partners, and that Israel was a

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<sup>104</sup> Strong, *Working in the World*, 192-201; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 227, and note 19, chapter 7, 440.; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 282.

tremendous to the US. It became clear to Carter that Begin did not want an agreement at this time. He wanted to return to Washington immediately, but the logistics of getting the presidential party out of Jerusalem that night proved too difficult. After they reconvened at the King David Hotel, one of Dayan's associates called and suggested they meet with Dayan. As it turned out, Begin's obstinacy was causing trouble within his cabinet. Weizman was even threatening to resign. Dayan said the cabinet would accept the US guarantees on Israel's oil supply and the accelerated Israeli withdrawal to an interim line in Sinai. Gaza, however, should not be a special case. He strongly encouraged Carter to meet with Begin again and present the ideas as American. Although Begin held back from a complete commitment, Carter finally knew he had an agreement in hand. Sadat did not quibble over the wording; he had promised the president a success and he delivered. Carter called Begin from the airport and told him that an agreement had been reached. Then he and Sadat walked out on the tarmac and told the waiting press corps.<sup>105</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Carter's efforts at trying to create a "comprehensive" peace did not bear fruit, but he successfully brokered a bi-lateral peace between Egypt and Israel, which has remained intact. – battered, but intact. This was a stunning achievement. There were few accolades for him at the time, in spite of the Herculean effort he put forth. Carter says that his polls actually dropped in March 1979. The press was hostile. Positive stories could not match the negative "Can Carter Cope" stories.<sup>106</sup> The president faced harsh charges from some

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<sup>105</sup> Ann Mosely Lesch and Mark Tessler, *Israel, Egypt, and the Palestinians: From Camp David to Intifada*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 4, 5; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 228-233.

<sup>106</sup> John Orman, "Covering the American Presidency: Valenced Reporting in the Periodical Press, 1900-1982," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 19 (summer, 1984): 388. Jody Powell, the president's press secretary asserts that "if the First Lady had conceived, the White House press corps would have declared that it had happened despite the President's best efforts." Jody Powell, *The Other Side of the Story*, 55.

American Jews that he was no friend of Israel.<sup>107</sup> A misunderstanding over the wording of UN Resolution 465 on the situation in the occupied territories caused him grief. The US voted in favor of the resolution, which was critical of Israel, with the understanding that “all references to Jerusalem would be deleted. The failure to communicate this clearly resulted in a vote in favor of the resolution rather than abstention.”<sup>108</sup> Carter’s fortunes also suffered when Andrew Young, US ambassador to the UN, met with the UN observer for the PLO, something that seemed to some to be in violation of the US promise not to negotiate or recognize the PLO until it recognized Israel’s right to exist in peace. Although he probably should not have, Carter succumbed to the Israeli lobby’s pressure and fired Young.

From the vantage point of 2008 Carter was one of the best friends Israel could have had because he gave them excellent advice. Some heed should have been paid to his warnings that a lasting peace had to include a solution to the Palestinian problem, and Resolution 242 had to be carried out. It became, however, a dead letter. It has been forty years since the Six Day War, and there is no end in sight to the Palestinian plight. Israel has been subjected to countless acts of terrorism, and the Palestinian people have suffered extraordinary cruelties under both the Israelis and their own authorities. Carter, the human rights president, could not countenance this. His position on human rights brought him into confrontation with both Israel and Iran, which is by no means an indictment of his stance. The summer 2006 war with Hezbollah in Lebanon “showed the increasing

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<sup>107</sup> *AFP*, “Reply by the President (Carter) at a Question-and-Answer Session With Clifford Evans of RKO General Broadcasting, October 24, 2980”. Document 324. Carter affirmed the US position that it would not permit the enemies of Israel to isolate it in the international community. “Not only is Israel our friend and our ally, but attempts to isolate Israel are also intended to weaken this country and to destroy the progress that we have made already with the Camp David accords...”

<sup>108</sup> *AFP* “Statement by the President (Carter), March 3, 1980. *AFP Basic Documents*, Document 319. For Resolution 465 and the American United Nations representative, Donald McHenry’s comments, see *AFP*, Documents 317 and 318.

mediocrity of the [Israeli] military and the political leadership”<sup>109</sup> because it is now an army of occupation, still trying to control the occupied territories. Gaza is in civil war, which prevents any recovery, and could endanger the fragile idea of a Palestinian state. This could soon spread to the West Bank. It is as clear today as it was during Carter’s time in office that answers need to be found for the debacle of the occupied territories.

The PLO claimed that Camp David was a plan to liquidate the Palestinians politically, according to Hani al-Hassan, political advisor to PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat. Hassan also warned that those who supported Sadat would have to confront the PLO, and this would include Saudi Arabia, a country that was promised that the peace would be comprehensive. Additionally, he claimed that the Arab countries in the region would see the socialist bloc nations as their friends.<sup>110</sup> This criticism helped to fuel anti-Carter condemnation in the US because Carter de-emphasized the conflict with the Soviet Union, at least up until this point in his presidency. This enabled him to approach governments that the US had previously not considered friendly. And he saw the SU as an ally in the Middle East peace process, as co-chairs on the Geneva meeting, and this also caused alarm.

In another facet of the issue, most in the administration saw that the key to oil stability rested with a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace.<sup>111</sup> Carter understood that oil was a foreign policy issue and that the US was too dependent on it, and he tried to convince the country to break its addiction through conservation and a search for alternative fuels. Many of the American public, as well as Congress, refused to believe

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<sup>109</sup> Ari Shavit in the *New York Times*, June 9, 2007 available at [www.nytimes.com/2007/06/09/world/middleeast/09israel.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/09/world/middleeast/09israel.html). Accessed 6/10/07.

<sup>110</sup> Hani al-Hassan, “PLO on Camp David: ‘The Plan is to Liquidate the Palestinians Politically,’” *MERIP Reports* 72 (November, 1978): 12-13.

<sup>111</sup> See Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Recognizing the Crisis,” *Foreign Policy*, (winter 1974-1975), 67.



this. Congress, instead of helping Carter in his “moral equivalent of war” obstructed the legislation he wanted. The oil exporting countries had excessive amounts of money and contributed to the funding of a rising tide of high profile terrorism.<sup>112</sup> One of the flash points of this terrorism is the Palestinian-Israeli confrontations in the occupied territories. Islamic terrorism was on the rise and would soon surface in Iran.<sup>113</sup>

Sadat was shunned by much of the Arab community, but this could not last forever. He also faced increasing domestic pressures. On October 6, 1981 he was murdered by Islamic extremists, and one of the many charges they made against him was the Camp David Accords. His successor was less than enthusiastic about peace with Israel, but the peace has withstood this test as well.

Begin’s dream of a powerful Israel in control of Gaza and the West Bank and Jerusalem proved fleeting. The Lebanon war of 1982 created a great deal of controversy in Israel, and questions arose about his leadership as well as his vision. Casualties were high, and the war badly hurt the Israeli economy. Begin’s health was poor; his wife died; and late in 1983 he resigned as prime minister.<sup>114</sup>

Carter, the chief facilitator of the accords, still lost the 1980 election, amid a barrage of criticism, especially from the antagonistic and arrogant press which gave the neoconservatives a perfect opportunity. He also ended up receiving fewer Jewish votes than his Republican and independent rivals. Overseas, the reaction was much the same in both the Arab and Israeli world. The Arabs repudiated him, the only American president

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<sup>112</sup> See AFR, “Scope of the Threat: Statement by Secretary of State Vance before the Committee on Governmental Affairs, United States Senate, January 23, 1978, 472-477.

<sup>113</sup> John Dumbrell, *American Foreign Policy: Carter to Clinton*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 31.

<sup>114</sup> William B. Quandt, “Camp David and Peacemaking in the Middle East,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 101 no. 3 (1986): 357-358.

to call for a homeland for the Palestinians; and the Israelis resented being pushed into implementing Resolution 242. Both sides seem to be locked into old policies. The treaty itself, although denounced by some Arab sources, is proof that diplomacy can work. Currently, the United States has neglected this crucial issue, except for a hastily called meeting in Annapolis in the fall of 2007. This issue requires an *enormous* amount of effort and patience if solutions are to be found; and there are lessons that can be learned from Carter's endeavors. One of those lessons is that the US must be steadily and intimately involved in the process.

Carter describes two interrelated obstacles to peace today.

1. Some Israelis believe they have the right to confiscate and colonize Palestinian land and try to justify the sustained subjugation and persecution of increasingly hopeless and aggravated Palestinians; and
2. Some Palestinians react by honoring suicide bombers as martyrs to be rewarded in heaven and consider the killing of Israelis as victories.<sup>115</sup>

For a president often described as weak and indecisive, he took the boldest steps yet in his Middle East diplomacy.<sup>116</sup> No other president has pursued peace so doggedly. Finally, a *New York Times* poll in February 1985 found that the Camp David negotiations were viewed as the "most successful American foreign policy initiative in recent years. Both Democrats and Republicans gave Camp David a high rating."<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 206.

<sup>116</sup> Robert A. Strong, *Working in the World*, 204-206.

<sup>117</sup> See Adam Clymer, "Camp David at Top in US Policy Poll," *New York Times*, April 1, 1985, cited in Quandt, "Camp David and Peacemaking in the Middle East," 359. Simon Serfaty reminds us that the press is "Neither Hero nor Villain" in Simon Serfaty, ed., *The Media and Foreign Policy*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

## CHAPTER VII

### THE UNTHINKABLE REVOLUTION

#### INTRODUCTION

Iran, once known as Persia, was a place most Americans had little interest in, at least at one time; there seemed to be a fog of ignorance about the modern Iran of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This ignorance changed slowly and by degrees over the course of 1978 and early 1979, as the Iranian revolution gained traction. The revolution and subsequent hostage crisis is commonly viewed as Carter's greatest failure. This and the following chapter tell that story and argues that the seeds for the dissatisfaction were sewn in the early 1950s when the United States actively participated in overthrowing the government of Mohammad Mossadegh and reinstating Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as shah of Iran. The United States began to be looked upon as a meddler in Iranian affairs, not as an honest broker, to the chagrin and anger of its people. A second revolution, whether violent or peaceful, was likely, if not inevitable, and it came during the Carter administration. At that particular time an energized and vigorous shah might have held back the floodtide, but no such man existed. Instead, the shah toyed with various schemes and acted incoherently. In the end, even his "last ride" was a tumultuous one, causing grief to any number of governments, including and perhaps especially, the United States. This was a serious setback for the Carter administration. His top advisers disagreed on a course of action and the CIA acted incompetently, resulting in two bad options for Carter: abandon the shah or support a bloodbath. Carter chose neither. His diplomatic skills and patience were tested severely as he guided the country through the land mine that had become

Iran. These two chapters also argue that Carter's policies were successful, insofar as success was possible, given the nature of the regime that emerged. Although it was never again business as usual, all hostages came out alive; Iran was severely weakened financially; The Soviet Union was ensconced in Afghanistan facing its Vietnam War, and Iran endured a bloody eight year war with Iraq, all as a result of its own actions and Carter's prudence. Twenty-seven years later, in spite of the vigorous attacks on Carter's policies, no other United States government has done any better.

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Persia was not unknown to the West in modern times. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries it was dominated by the imperial rivalry between Great Britain and Russia. Britain wanted to slow down Russian expansion and protect its sea and land routes to India, while Russia wanted to reach the Indian Ocean through Iran. Both received concessions from the Qajar monarchs who repeatedly sold off the country's resources for small sums of money that could satisfy their immediate financial needs. The people of the country were increasingly dissatisfied with the incompetence of their government as well as foreign political and economic control, and demanded a constitution. This was signed in December 1906. By this time the Russians controlled the northern tier and Britain the southern tier of Iran. Only the center remained at least nominally independent, but not for long.<sup>1</sup> The Anglo-Persian Oil Company was formed in 1909 and the construction of a pipeline and refinery soon followed.

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<sup>1</sup> Gene R. Garthwaite, *The Persians*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 218. In 1907 Britain and Russia signed the Anglo-Russian Convention, trying to reduce their rivalry in Asia, including Iran, and established the spheres of influence. In 1915 Britain negotiated with Russia to include the neutral zone within its sphere of influence because of its oil interests in Khuzestan.

By World War I Persia had become a pawn in the battles of other nations. In 1919 Britain occupied the northern part of Persia to enforce the Turkish armistice conditions and to contain any Bolshevik poison. The Iranians suffered grievously, both from the disruptions and disorders, famine, and the flu pandemic. The government exercised little control. Britain also took tighter control of the increasingly lucrative oil fields. In 1925 Reza Shah Pahlavi seized power and established the Pahlavi dynasty, the last dynasty before the Islamic revolution in 1979. He proceeded to modernize Iran, much the same as Ataturk was modernizing Turkey. He built railroads and roads and ended the lucrative agreements between his country and the European states. He changed the regulations on foreign oil companies to gain more of the revenues for Iranians. He also reduced the influence of religion and strengthened secular state courts. Iranian men had to wear western style clothing and the women had to remove their veils.<sup>2</sup> When Hitler took power in Germany, the Shah cultivated close ties with him, in an effort to decrease the influence of the British. Iran declared itself neutral at the start of World War II, but the British and Soviets invaded and occupied the country anyway, in order to lessen German dominance in the area and to allow supplies to reach the Soviet Union. Oil access was also a factor. They deposed Reza Shah on September 16, 1941 and installed his son Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. He was twenty-two. He was also much weaker than his father and used foreign aid to stay in power. He was obsessed with all things

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 216-217; Barry Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 11-13, 37. See also Richard W. Cottam, *Iran and the U.S. Congress*, House of Representatives, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, "Iran: Evaluation of U.S. Intelligence Performance Prior to November 1978" (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], January 1979), *United States: A Cold War Case Study*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1988).

military from the beginning. This was different from his father who had worked for more Iranian independence.<sup>3</sup>

American diplomats, soldiers, and leaders got their first experience with Iran during World War II. When President Franklin Roosevelt traveled to Tehran to meet with Josef Stalin and Winston Churchill, the United States took the lead in proposing a formal joint statement by all three powers for Iran's independence and territorial integrity after the war was over. The purpose was clear: to prevent the Soviet Union from changing its military occupation into political hegemony. By this time, 1943, United States soldiers were also in the country. In spite of the agreement not to, all three occupying countries meddled in Iranian affairs. When the war was over, the United States and Britain withdrew within the six-month period stipulated by the agreement. The Soviets, however, lingered, waging a campaign of intimidation and manipulation, trying to establish a puppet state. In 1946 the Tehran government overthrew the communist regime in its northern province of Azerbaijan. Strong United States support for Iran in the United Nations and elsewhere convinced the Russians to pull out. Some call this one of the opening shots of the Cold War.<sup>4</sup> The shah was shaken by the crisis, as he would be by others that loomed on the horizon.

In April 1951 the Iranian parliament, the Majles, voted to nationalize the concessions and installations of the Anglo-Iranian (some say Anglo-Persian) Oil

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<sup>3</sup>For an account of the shah's educational experience, as well as the coup that installed him, see David Harris, *The Crisis*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2004.)

<sup>4</sup>See Sick, *All Fall Down*. Others have different ideas about the "opening shot." Some believe that Stalin's speech on February 9, 1946 announcing that communism and capitalism were incompatible and predicting a confrontation in the 1950s was the opening shot; others believed that Winston Churchill's "iron curtain" speech would trigger war, and still others agreed that it was the Soviet's refusal to leave Iran that was it. See David McCullough, *Truman*; Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions*, 20-22. See also Charles A. Kupchan, *The Persian Gulf and the West* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987) for a discussion on the security dilemmas in the region. Also see Anthony Cordesman, *The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984.)

Company, The British had been the majority stockholders since 1914 and had dominated the production and sale of Iranian oil. From this position Britain also influenced Iranian economic policy and politics. This was a genuine nationalist revolt against foreign intervention, and the shah responded by appointing Mohammad Mossadegh as prime minister. When negotiations between the British and Iranians broke down, the British initiated a de facto boycott on Iranian oil. The United States tried to mediate the argument, but little came of it. Mossadegh was intensely popular in Iran, and he began to take more and more power for himself, undermining the shah. However, when he demanded control of the armed forces, the shah dismissed him, only to be forced to reinstate him because of his popularity. He was a charismatic leader able to cut across class lines. Several months later Mossadegh dismissed the Majles.<sup>5</sup> The British, along with American oilmen, told President Eisenhower that Mossadegh was a communist. When his popularity began to wane, he pulled closer to the Tudeh party, which was pro-communist, stoking more fears of a communist coup. British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden came to the United States and proposed a joint venture to overthrow Mossadegh. Ike was receptive, and this created the cause of the long-term tension between Iran and the United States. He intended to use the CIA much more and in different ways than his predecessor, Truman, because he believed that “nuclear war was unimaginable, limited conventional war was unwinnable, and stalemate unacceptable.” Iran furnished the opportunity for the CIA to shine. Code Ajax, as the coup was called was planned in early summer 1953. They would overthrow Mossadegh and reinstate the shah, by means of out and out bribery, through a street mob hired by the US, and through the Iranian army

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<sup>5</sup> Sick, *All Fall Down*, 5-6. Unfortunately, the shah’s restoration to the throne by the United States delegitimized him and became a factor in the 1978 revolution. See Garthwaite, *The Persians*, 237, 239-41; Gasiorowski, “The CIA Looks Back at the 1953 Coup in Iran, 4-5.

which arrested him. By this time opposition to Mossadegh had crystallized, making things easier.<sup>6</sup> Eisenhower did not participate in planning the coup, and was careful to leave no documents implicating him in this sort of deed. Foster Dulles, the secretary of state, kept him informed over cocktails.

The coup was a great success – that is, for the United States. Eisenhower bought the nation twenty-six years of stability in the oil rich Persian Gulf region. On the other hand, the shah was restored with even more power, but lost legitimacy, and he made a deal to give American oil giants 40 percent of Iran’s oil. The lack of legitimacy and the generous concessions to the Americans were problematic for the remainder of his reign and became a major factor in the revolution. The general contradiction in the situation concerned power and principle. The United States had genuine economic and political interests, plus a commitment to democratic principles. Beginning in the 1940s, while the United States talked about the latter, it based its policies on the former. Eisenhower announced an \$85 million package of economic aid for Iran and everyone lived happily ever after; except, of course, for the Iranian people and the British oil tycoons, who lost their monopoly. But a dangerous precedent had been set. The CIA was going to do the president’s bidding. He did not have to deal with Congress, his cabinet, or the press and public.<sup>7</sup> Also, an ominous revolutionary “cause” and a grievance against the United States were created in Iran. Mossadegh became a national icon. Although the shah was

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<sup>6</sup> James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 49; Richard W. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), 283; see also Haib Ladjevardi, “The Origins of United States Support for an Autocratic Iran,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15 (May 1983): 225-239; Michael A. Ledeen and William Lewis, *Debauchery*; A.H.H. Abidi, “The Iranian Revolution: Its Origins and Dimensions,” *International Studies* 18 (April-June 1979): 129-161; James A. Bill and Carl Leiden, *Politics in the Middle East*, (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 200.

<sup>7</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 49; Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 332-333. See also Mark J. Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.).



regaining some popular support at home, the myth developed that the United States had imposed a harsh tyrant on them. Kermit Roosevelt, who participated in the coup, later wrote that the shah had told him that he owed his “throne to God, my people, my army – and to you!” Roosevelt agreed that it was a rekindling of popular support for the shah that allowed the plan to succeed.<sup>8</sup> Ironically, Roosevelt’s account came out in 1979, the year the shah was deposed. Unfortunately, Washington has a short memory, and by 1978 the events of twenty-five years earlier had little relevance. Prior to 1953 the United States acted as the honest broker for Iran, keeping both the British and the Soviets at bay, but it would never be seen in that light again.<sup>9</sup> American intervention in Iran ensured that there would be no communist takeover in Iran, but it also alienated the liberal, moderate nationalists as well as Iranian patriots of all classes. It paved the way for the birth of extremism across the political spectrum.<sup>10</sup>

The vice president at the time of the coup was Richard Nixon, and he paid a visit to the shah in 1953. He found a shah ready and eager to cooperate with the United States against any Soviet threat in the Persian Gulf. Nixon was pleased, even enthusiastic. This relationship endured, even when Nixon was out of power. During the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, a good deal of foreign aid and military assistance went to Iran, although it was always less than the shah wanted. The United States constantly urged the shah to pay attention to nation building, but he was fixated on all things military. He routinely wrote to Ike telling him of the dire security threats he faced, requesting the most

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<sup>8</sup> Kermit Roosevelt, *Countercoup: The Struggle for the Control of Iran*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979.); see also Moens, “President Carter’s Advisers and the Fall of the Shah,” 211-237.

<sup>9</sup> Garthwaite *The Persians*, 252; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 6-7; for a case study in Eisenhower’s policy toward Iran see Charles A. Kupchan, “American Globalism in the Middle East: The Roots of Regional Security Policy,” *Political Science Quarterly* 103 (winter, 1988-1989): 585-611.

<sup>10</sup> Bill *The Eagle and the Lion*, 94.

advanced weapons systems. Eisenhower dampened down the rhetoric and responded in tones that were “blunt and authoritative.” Coming from the man who had been the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, the shah had little else to say. However, the two crises the Shah had faced in his life up to that time – foreign occupation during World War II and Mossadegh in 1953 – taught him that a strong and well equipped Iranian army was essential to deter foreign intervention. A second lesson was that it was dangerous to allow a charismatic or independent rival get close to the seat of power. The first lesson meant that the relationship with the United States was dominated almost from the beginning by military desires. The shah’s obsession with this grew stronger with time. The second lesson meant that he would try to accumulate all power within his own hands and would surround himself with compliant ministers who would do his bidding. This was obvious from 1953 on.<sup>11</sup> In 1978, however, he seems to have forgotten the second lesson, allowing his arch enemy, the Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini, to return to Iran.

During the Kennedy administration, United States officials came to believe that the shah needed to pay more attention to political liberalization and less to attention to the military. With this in mind, they gravitated towards Dr. Ali Amini, a former ambassador to the United States, as a man who might be able to carry out political and economic reforms. Kennedy and his advisors made no secret of this. This put a great deal of pressure on the shah, and he appointed Amini prime minister in May 1961. It was a pyrrhic victory for Washington; he was tagged as “Washington’s Man.” The shah recognized him as a potential threat to his own power, and dismissed him after only

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<sup>11</sup> “An Old Friend Returns,” MERIP Reports 14 (February, 1973): 16; Garthwaite, *The Persians*, 247. For a discussion on the Ayatollah and the mythology surrounding him and the shah, see Fereydoun Hoveyda, *The Shah and the Ayatollah*, (Westport, Ct., Praeger, 2003.).

fifteen months. He then created his own “White Revolution” of land reform and modernization.<sup>12</sup>

In 1963 a third crisis erupted – this time it was with the clergy and was led by a *mujtahid*, or religious authority named Ruholla Khomeini. The uprising concerned the economic and political program of the shah. Khomeini had opposed the shah’s father in the 1940s, but had largely been silent during the 1950s. In 1963 he emerged on the political scene once more with a denunciation of the “Westoxication” – the indiscriminate copying of things Western – of the shah and his regime. The SAVAK, the acronym for the shah’s secret security forces, cracked down savagely. He was arrested several times, but always returned to his vocal opposition activities. In 1964 the Majlis approved a measure that exempted United States military personnel from Iranian law. They were not to be held accountable, a measure that clearly assaulted Iranian sovereignty. This came to be known in the United States as the Status of Force Agreement (SOFA) and in Iran as the Capitulations Agreement. The response was swift in Iran, and Iranian nationalists, regardless of their political leanings, expressed outrage. Shortly thereafter, the parliament authorized the Iranian government to accept a loan provided by private American banks and guaranteed by the United States government. It clearly was a payoff for the passage of SOFA. The United States then attempted to broaden the diplomatic immunity of its military. The Iranians capitulated in 1964. The Iranians had a great sensitivity to this issue who considered their country a victim of both the British and the

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<sup>12</sup> Sick, *All Fall Down*, 10. See also Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Answer to History*, (New York: Stein and Day, 1980); See Bill and Leiden *Politics in the Middle East*, 202. The revolution was aimed at the peasantry, the class that completely supports the traditional system and the patrimonial leader at the center of the system. See also Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 131-153 for a detailed account of the Kennedy administration, which mixed reform with repression. This was, in their view, the best way to counter communism.

Russians from 1828 to 1928. The agreement with the Americans was rejected by both the secular and religious intelligentsia of Iran and gave fodder to Ayatollah Khomeini who never forgave the United States for it.<sup>13</sup> To Khomeini it smacked of the extraterritorial privileges of Iran's colonial past. This time he was exiled to Turkey for his activities. From there he went to Iraq, and did not return to Iran for fourteen years. The episode had many parallels with the 1978 revolution, but was little publicized in the United States. The government and media focused on the shah's reform program, not his harsh tactics. These were unpleasant, yes, but were needed in order to contain the reactionary elements in Iranian society. The shah also viewed things in this light. This was a tragic mistake because it failed to see how deep the resentment was to the Westernization of Iran. Journalists virtually ignored the voice of Iranian dissidents – their focus was on the Soviet Union's dissidents. The difference in coverage between the Soviet Union and Iran is striking.<sup>14</sup> The Iranian people were mostly, at that time, illiterate, impoverished, and traditional in their outlook. The economic prosperity that Iran was now enjoying glossed over the discontent; but if it should falter, the frustrations would re-emerge with a vengeance. No one seemed to understand this – not the shah and not Western observers. The shah was convinced that it was all a plot concocted by a little known individual who dealt secretly with foreign agents and who owed his title of *ayatollah* to radio stations run by atheist émigrés who were part of the Tudeh Party.<sup>15</sup>

The failure to understand the significance of the events of 1963 was a costly error. When the rebellion began again in 1978, few Americans were familiar with Khomeini or

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<sup>13</sup> Bill *The Eagle and the Lion*, 158-160.

<sup>14</sup> William A. Dorman and Mansour Farhang, *The U.S. Press and Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 3, 146; see Richard W. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*; Nawaf E. Obaid, "In Al-Saud We Trust," *Foreign Policy* 128 (January, 2002): 72-74; Garthwaite, *The Persians*, 247-248.

<sup>15</sup> Pahlavi, *Answer to History*, 104.

his seemingly pathological hatred of the US. The shah, however, cemented in his mind a lesson learned earlier from his father: the power of the *mullahs* could be contained only by force. Neither father nor son could stomach what they believed to be a reactionary group, opposed to modernization and progress. There were many in the professional and modernizing middle class who agreed with this position, even if they did not always agree with the methods that were used in dealing with them. After the riots of 1963 had been subdued, it seemed to most that the shah had definitively broken the power of the mullahs. But the shah found it difficult to balance the promotion of Iranian nationalism with his seeming dependence on the US. After the riots, Iran experienced strong economic growth and modernization, fueled by an increase in oil revenues, which grew from \$555 million in 1963 to \$5 billion in 1973. The benefits, however, were not well distributed, and there were still many grindingly poor people in the country. By 1973 oil revenues were about \$20 billion, and throughout the period the government consistently had a hard time deciding how the country should absorb it. It decided to spend it mostly on the military. But, in 1971 the shah decided to have a party to celebrate 2500 years of Iranian history. It was one of the most lavish displays of wealth, and brought into sharp focus the disparity between the enormous wealth of the court and the abject poverty of many of the subjects. Many who took part in the 1978 revolution mark this as a turning point for them.<sup>16</sup> Most of the preparations for the celebration were the responsibility of foreigners. The gowns, costumes, and military uniforms were made in France. Much of the food and wine was also French – prepared in France and flown to Iran, and this provoked Iranian nationalism, but it was directed against the shah. A few months before

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<sup>16</sup> Morteza Gharehbaghian, "Oil Revenue and the Militarisation of Iran: 1960-1978, *Social Scientist* 15 (April-May 1987): 89; Garthwaite, *The Persians*, 250-251.

the grand affair, guerrilla terrorists struck. It seemed obvious that the celebration would provide wide opportunities for them to strike again. SAVAK went into high gear and the Iranian people were subjected to extraordinary security measures.<sup>17</sup>

*The Nixon-Kissinger Years*

The great celebration did raise the international stature of the shah. While Nixon did not attend, but sent the vice president, Spiro Agnew; and Nixon and Kissinger visited Tehran in May 1972. By 1972 the shah was at the peak of his power and Iran seemed ready to join the developed world. Richard Nixon was also at the peak of his power. He had forged an opening with China, secured an arms limitations treaty from Moscow as well as an agreement on “Basic Principles of Relations,” and it was from Moscow that he flew to Tehran. The United States was already supplying an enormous amount of arms to Iran, fueling its imperialist ambitions. Nixon approved the shah’s request to buy advanced American jet fighters; and, astonishingly, ordered that all future requests for non-nuclear weapons systems be approved without “second-guessing his requests,”<sup>18</sup> an example of the Nixon Doctrine in action, which stated that United States allies would have to shoulder the responsibility for their own defense in non-nuclear cases of aggression. This doctrine grew out of the relative weakness of the country during the latter years of the Vietnam War. The United States appointed proxies to act in its behalf. Appointing Iran as a proxy demonstrated Nixon’s and Kissinger’s concern for the two traditional interests in Iran: oil and the containment of the Soviet Union. In addition, the United States agreed to increase the number of advisers and technicians in Iran, and

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<sup>17</sup> Marvin Zonis, *Majestic Failure*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 69.

<sup>18</sup> Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, ((Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 1264.

would join it in supporting the Kurdish nationalist insurgency against Iraq.<sup>19</sup> The deal radically restructured US-Iranian relations. It was a personal triumph for the shah who, for years, had been kept on a short leash by American presidents. To be recognized by Henry Kissinger as a great strategic thinker was an accomplishment indeed. He had arrived. The American arsenal was open, and he had the oil revenues to purchase almost anything he wanted. Earlier, in March 1971, the British had announced their intention to withdraw their forces from the Persian Gulf (east of Suez); the United States was still bogged down in Vietnam; and a new geopolitical structure had been assembled at the Moscow and Peking summits. It seemed right for the shah to play a security role in the region.<sup>20</sup> Iran became one of the “twin pillars” of security in the Gulf region. The other was Saudi Arabia, albeit a junior twin.

The Department of Defense initially sent up a howl of protest at the open ended gift to the shah. Year after year defense officials had been required to analyze and assess Iran’s military capabilities. Year after year they had concluded that Iran could best address the threats to its northern and western borders by the steady, systematic development and training of its military forces, rather than by the massive introduction of high tech equipment. There was never any question that the United States should provide Iran with military assistance. The real question centered on whether the shah’s obsession with weaponry should supersede the best professional judgment of the Pentagon as to whether the purchases actually strengthened Iran or not. Kissinger wanted to cut off the

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<sup>19</sup> Zonis, *Majestic Failure*, 69; Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions*, 134.; “U.S. Arms Sales to Iran,” *MERIP* 51, (October, 1976): 15-18; Leslie M. Pryor, “Arms and the Shah,” 56-71.

<sup>20</sup> Zonis, *Majestic Failure*, 71; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1261; Gharehbaghian, “Oil Revenue and the Militarisation of Iran: 1960-1978,” 87-100. See also Gregory Gause, III, “Arms Supplies and Military Spending in the Gulf,” *Middle East Report*, 204, “The Arabian Peninsula, (July-September, 1997): 12-14..

argument. He issued a memorandum that served notice that in the future, decisions on Iranian purchases of weapons would be left in the hands of the government of Iran. In the first four years after the Nixon-Kissinger visit in 1972, Iran bought more than \$9 billion worth of the most sophisticated military equipment the United States had in its arsenal. It was a “stampede,” and a scandal. Both American salesmen and Iranian officials underestimated the amount of training and technical support Iran would need to maintain the expensive systems. This led to frustration on the part of the Iranians and tensions between the two countries. By the 1978-79 revolution, the Iranian people were convinced that the Americans had defrauded them. The Ayatollah Khomeini asserted that the Americans had grabbed Iranian oil revenues and left them with useless hardware. The events of 1973, however, namely the Yom Kippur War and subsequent Saudi oil embargo, convinced Nixon and Kissinger that they were justified in their actions. The shah needed to be in the American camp because of the oil. He knew it and knew that it gave him leverage. In 1970 the United States had become a net oil importer; by 1976, 42 percent of United States consumption came from overseas, and 38 percent of imports were from the Persian Gulf.<sup>21</sup>

Two different secretaries of state sent personal representatives to Tehran to try to impose some sort of order on the affair. In addition, James Schlesinger, now secretary of defense, was greatly troubled that the United States would push sophisticated weapons on unsophisticated nations which could not absorb them, and would thus erode confidence in the United States as a reliable partner. The accelerated arms sales meant more technicians and advisers. By July 1976 there were 24,000 Americans working in Iran. The relatively higher living standard of the Americans and the belief that they were taking jobs away

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<sup>21</sup> Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions*, 135-139; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 14-15.



from Iranians fueled anti-American feelings. Also, Iran couldn't keep up: villagers who were often not even familiar with cars became mechanics for armored personnel carriers. Schlesinger had several meetings with the shah trying to convince him that his most pressing problem was the lack of trained manpower to use the weapons. However, if the shah insisted on buying a particular weapon, Schlesinger deferred to his wishes. As a result of the discussions the shah did ask for more support and technical advice.

Subsequently Schlesinger sent a retired Army colonel, Richard Hallock, to Tehran to do an assessment. He was to act as an independent set of eyes and ears. Schlesinger became increasingly uneasy and asked his staff to prepare a candid evaluation of the security relationship with Iran. The report concluded that whatever the shah wanted, he evidently could have. It was a presidential order. Schlesinger did not take that as the final word and appointed a personal representative, Glenn Blitgen, to conduct an in depth analysis of the military supply relationship. One area was off limits – Hallock's very complex mission to Iran. He had his own consulting firm, was on retainer by the Iranian government, and was to report directly to the secretary of defense. It was an unorthodox arrangement. Schlesinger's cautionary concerns began to have influence, after Nixon's resignation in August 1974, which was when he asked Blitgen to do the study. Kissinger was now secretary of state as well as national security adviser, and there was a running competition between him and Schlesinger. With Blitgen's report in hand, he approached President Gerald Ford with his misgivings. Kissinger was crafty, however, and he had resources. He controlled the NSC staff, which managed the paper flow to the White House on foreign affairs. By November 1975 there was still no response, and Schlesinger was replaced by Donald Rumsfeld. A response came in the spring of 1976, in

the form of a directive to conduct an interagency study, not confined to Iran. The topic was so broad and the divisions within the government were so deep that it was doomed to failure. It was shredded in the memory hole of interagency bickering. Consumed with East-West relations, Washington remained ignorant of Iran's domestic difficulties. Scholars tried to draw attention to the coming storm, but it fell on deaf ears. The shah became hopelessly identified as "Washington's Man." It did not help that Nixon had appointed Richard Helms, former CIA director, to be the American ambassador to Tehran. This fueled suspicions that the United States was again trying to secure its interests in the region through the CIA. Much of Iranian policy got caught up in the argument between Congress and the executive over control of foreign policy, an argument that dominated the mid-1970s. There were critics, however, who advocated a more limited and cautious approach. They pointed to the brutality of SAVAK in the repression of freedom, as well as the poor distribution of wealth as being of major concern.<sup>22</sup> Defenders of the twin pillar policy carried the day. The administration pinned its entire Persian Gulf policy on the stability and strength of Iran. The report ended up with Carter, to be incorporated into his review of the United States arms transfer policies in the spring of 1977.<sup>23</sup>

#### THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S POLICIES

Carter, driven to a very great extent by morality, campaigned on (among other things) the two themes of human rights and arms sales reduction – bad news for the shah,

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<sup>22</sup>See Thomas Friedman, "The First Law of Petropolitics," *Foreign Policy* (May-June 2006): 28-39 for an interesting discussion on freedom and oil; see also Bill and Leiden, *Politics in the Middle East*, 203, who point out that between 1972 and 1976 the shah's policy of blending repression and reform was abandoned and in its place there emerged a period of stifling police rule. Censorship was heavy-handed and torture was systematically utilized in the prisons.

<sup>23</sup>Vance, *Hard Choices*, 314-316; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 357; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 19, 15-18; Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions*, 138-139, 141-48; "An Old Friend Returns," 6.

who preferred Republicans to Democrats in general because he could chisel more out of them. Carter inherited an Iran that *seemed* on the surface to be stable. The Nixon-Kissinger policy of putting United States security interests in the Persian Gulf in the hands of the shah had been fully absorbed by the Washington bureaucracy. Yes, there were concerns among some people about his authoritarianism, but the only real concern was that he might be doing too much too fast. The inspector general of the Foreign Service reported eighteen months before the revolution that there were no effective internal challenges to the shah. Unbeknown to the new administration, United States security in the Gulf was hostage to the shah's economic and social experiment. According to some, Carter had little choice but to continue the relationship because policy "bridges had been burned years before." The shah, of course, had no viable alternative to Washington either.<sup>24</sup>

A very large problem for the Carter administration was the shah's abuse of human rights. Repeated reports by Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists began to draw some public attention. Slowly, the American media began to tell some of the stories of assassinations and torture which had become commonplace in the 1970s. SAVAK conducted unlimited warfare against several urban guerrilla organizations that violently opposed the shah. During and immediately after the American elections the shah reduced the use of torture and the number of political prisoners. He also introduced some limited reforms. Carter's election inspired this. His efforts at institution building, however, were hesitant, tentative, and in the end,

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<sup>24</sup> Yonah Alexander and Allan Nanes, Eds., *The United States and Iran: A Documentary History* (Frederick MD: Aletheia Books, University Publications of America, 1980), 435; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 22; R.K. Ramazani, *The United States and Iran: The Patterns of Influence*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982), 91.

unconvincing. Although he claimed that his order to cease torture was not related to events in the US, the people in Washington welcomed the reforms, such as they were, and were lulled into believing they were a good sign of progress to come. The Carter team decided to continue supporting the shah, but made important demands that he rein in SAVAK, and they put forth a concerted effort to find out more about the shah's opposition. This was different from the Nixon-Ford administrations, when American diplomats were routinely advised to accommodate the shah's wishes that no contact be made with the dissenters.<sup>25</sup>

The administration also believed in Iran's strategic centrality in the Gulf, and continued arms sales into 1978, but at a diminished level. The trend indicators used by SIPRI show a decrease in actual deliveries of major conventional weapons from 5185 in 1977 to 1925 in 1978. The indicator is 240 in 1979.<sup>26</sup> This appears to be a rather definite reduction, but Brzezinski's account leaves a somewhat different feeling. He says that the United States decided to continue approving "major sales of arms to Iran in the course of 1978..." which was true. But there was still a noticeable reduction of actual transfers. The administration tried to encourage the shah to tie his modernization efforts to progress toward constitutional rule. In the long run internal stability in Iran would suffer if progress was not made along these lines. The shah indicated that he had plans for this, and he did create positive changes in the status of women, the rights of small peasants, and more widespread education.<sup>27</sup> But this enraged the traditionalists in the country who thought that women voting were probably the handiwork of the devil. The administration also knew that United States ties to Iran would suffer if the American public saw flagrant

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<sup>25</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 355; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 315-317.

<sup>26</sup> SIPRI Arms transfers database, as of March 7, 2007; Ledeen and Lewis, *Debacle*, 83-85.

<sup>27</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 357; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 316.

violations of human rights, and Carter prudently tried to maintain a balance between the United States support of the shah and an insistence on addressing human rights – a balance between power and principle. The shah vacillated, also caught, not between power and principle, but by a kind of ennui, perhaps believing that if the unthinkable happened, the United States would again rescue him. This, however, was not 1953.

Carter voiced support for the shah but also recognized that the United States ultimately had no control over the decisions made by the Iranian people.<sup>28</sup> He was pulled in different directions because the State Department and the National Security Council did not agree on a course of action. More than on any other issue that this work addresses, the divisions, especially the public ones on Iranian policy, caused damage to the Carter presidency. There were no forces in Washington that could have prevented the crisis in Iran, but a different grouping might have seen the signs sooner, and acted better, and with more success with the successor Islamic government. This split prevented it from presenting a viable course of action.<sup>29</sup>

#### *Brzezinski and Vance*

Brzezinski was an expert on East-west issues, and he brought this expertise with him to the White House. He was also concerned about the Middle East, the United States-China relationship, and the Iranian debacle; but this concern was always overlaid by a suspicion that the Soviets were up to mischief, and the United States needed to be mindful of that. He relished confrontation with the Soviets, unlike Vance who was deeply committed to finding common ground with them. Vance was an “establishment”

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<sup>28</sup> President's News Conference November 30, 1978. John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* (online). Available at [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid), accessed 26 June 2007.

<sup>29</sup> John Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, inc., 1991), 434-435.

professional who had managed numerous crises during the Johnson administration, most notably in Cyprus and Detroit. From his experiences in government and his observations of the Kissinger years, there emerged a belief that the United States should maintain détente with the Soviet Union.<sup>30</sup>

Indigenous nationalism was another issue that divided the two men. Vance believed that nationalism would override ideology, and therefore the United States did not have to be fearful of every radical movement around the world. Brzezinski, on the other hand, believed that this nationalism worked to the advantage of the Soviets. He was also more prepared to use force wherever he believed the national interest was endangered, whereas Vance opted for quiet, patient diplomacy. Brzezinski believed that the nerve center in foreign policy making should be the National Security Council, which is located in the White House; and he was fairly successful in making it so during his tenure, much to the chagrin of Vance. This was bound to affect their relationship with each other in negative ways, as well as their relationship to the president.

Brzezinski tended to think in overarching global terms and grand, sometimes Machiavellian, schemes, while Vance was the detail man, a career diplomat who understood the limits of American power and who disliked abstractions. Vance tended to push human rights more than Brzezinski, stubbornly refusing to discard them when the going got rough. The most profound example of this was his refusal to endorse a military crackdown, known as the Iron Fist option, against the protesters and demonstrators in Iran in 1978, whereas Brzezinski held onto that option until the end.

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<sup>30</sup> See Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989); see also Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Between Two Ages: America's Role in the Technetronic Era*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1970).

The differences between the two men became acute during the Iranian revolution and later hostage crisis. They were so profound that no viable policy for the United States emerged. Brzezinski recalls that he was focused primarily on the strategic importance of Iran to the West, and that it was important to protect the oil interests. He believed that Vance was more preoccupied with promoting democracy, and feared actions that might have negative effects. Further, when the crisis became acute, the State Department was more interested in getting Americans out of Iran than what the American position was inside it. He states that the United States should have pressed the shah harder and earlier to take a more assertive and tougher line, and then move towards reform afterwards.<sup>31</sup> The problem was that the shah should have acted earlier, and the administration's inability to see how far advanced the problem had become was a serious failure. Vance describes the shah's policy as "repression and concession" and it had not worked. The United States approach was a traditional carrot and stick one, not "concession and conciliation" as Brzezinski describes it.<sup>32</sup> The whole thing was a dangerous brew of interdepartmental rivalry, basic differences on the nature of the threats the nation faced, and an ad hoc process not codified into either law or custom. The administration, of course, understood that Iran was exceedingly important, but was unable to definitively identify the threats to the shah and by extension the threats to the

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<sup>31</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 354-357; see also David McClellan *Cyrus Vance*, *American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy*, Number 20, (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985).

<sup>32</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 314-323. Although the conventional view that the divisions between the NSC and State caused serious problems with decision making, not all scholars believe this. See, for example, Alexander Moens, "President Carter's Advisers and the Fall of the Shah," 210-237. Moens argues that the process itself was badly flawed and this explains the "ambiguous and ineffective American handling of the crisis," See Charles-Philippe David, Nancy Ann Carrol, and Zachary A. Selden, *Foreign Policy Failure in the White House*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1993), for a comparison of decision making theory in the fall of the shah and the Iran-Contra affair. See also Jean A. Garrison "Framing Foreign Policy Alternatives in the Inner Circle, 775-807. Another view is that Vance and Brzezinski worked on different issues, until Iran, and this prevented the split from appearing too early in the administration.

United States position in the Gulf. Knowing what the threat is, is the first step in crafting a successful policy. Also, they might have placed too much importance on the *person* rather than on Iran itself.

### *Arms Transfers*

The shah wanted AWACS and Carter, accepting Iran's need for a strong air defense system, approved of the sale, although he reduced the number of aircraft requested. There was intense public debate. By now Congress had passed a law that it could veto any arms sale by a vote of disapproval in both the House and Senate. This was largely in response to the Nixon-Kissinger era policies. Congress no longer wanted to be seen as a rubber stamp, but at the same time was reluctant to reverse the president on an important foreign policy initiative. The result, in general, was the worst of two worlds. The administration often got what it wanted in arms sales, but only after acrimonious political debate leaving the recipient nation acutely embarrassed and the United States forfeiting most, if not all, of any goals it wanted to achieve through the sale of the arms. This is what happened to Iran, which might have muddied the waters in how the shah perceived America's true intentions. Also, since Carter had stated his intent to have the White House review and approve/disapprove arms sales, this ensured that he would be personally tied to any requests. At first the House Foreign Affairs Committee vetoed the sale of AWACS. It took several months of negotiations with Iran and intense lobbying efforts in Congress to get the sale through. Carter also approved the sale of training and spare parts to keep previously sold equipment in good working order. This should have sent a strong signal that the United States remained committed to the shah, which might have given him the stamina to stave off the revolution. But the message got



blurred by the intense criticism Congress had of the shah's authoritarian regime,<sup>33</sup> with the story sloppily reported by the press. This was in spite of the fact that Carter held more news conferences and was more accessible to the press than any other president. The press did not help to convey Carter's message to the people at all. The fact was, and is, that after the press broke the Watergate story, an enormous achievement, everybody became an instant investigative reporter, snooping into closets to find whatever scandals they might.<sup>34</sup>

### *The Shah Visits Washington*

Vance extended Carter's invitation to the shah to visit the United States in November 1977. Carter also appointed William Sullivan as ambassador to Iran. The post had been vacant since Richard Helms, former CIA director, occupied it during the Ford Administration. The choice was viewed symbolically as another in a long line of ambassadors who saw their role as supporting the shah unequivocally, and Sullivan proved to be a mistake, at least in the eyes of Carter.<sup>35</sup> By some accounts, the shah clearly knew that something had gone terribly wrong between him and his people, and he needed to know what the president thought about him.<sup>36</sup> By the time of the shah's arrival United States policy had been set. He spent five hours in direct talks with the president, and the policy should have been clear to him by that time. In the week before his arrival demonstrators from about 60,000 Iranian students in the United States began arriving in

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<sup>33</sup> I.M. Destler, Leslie H. Gelb, and Anthony Lake, *Our Own Worst Enemy: The Unmaking of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 157-158; see also Leslie M. Pryor, "Arms and the Shah," 56-71..

<sup>34</sup> Don Richardson, ed., *Conversations With Carter*, "Interview with Jimmy Carter," October 17, 1997, 328.

<sup>35</sup> Richard W. Cottam, *Iran and the United States*, 161. Cottam relates that one segment of the opposition, the liberal and leftists, hoped that the United States would convince the shah to accept a position as constitutional monarch and hold free elections, which they believed they would win.

<sup>36</sup> Ramazani, *The United States and Iran*, 95.

Washington. Each day they assembled at Lafayette Park across from the White House, masked to avoid identification by SAVAK, shouting anti shah epithets. The Iranian embassy organized counter demonstrations. The noise level was excruciating and incessant, so much so that some employees of the White House became ill. At the welcoming ceremony, they were so unruly, engaging in physical combat with each other, that the police broke up the crowds with tear gas. Analysts later point to this as an early sign of the revolution. The next day the newspaper showed Carter wiping tears from his eyes as the shah spoke. That night Carter eased everyone's embarrassment with his toast to the shah, saying among other things that the shah certainly knew how to draw a crowd. Meanwhile, in Iran, it was widely believed that only Carter could have organized such demonstrations, and many believed that this signaled his abandonment of the shah. Their own demonstrations and protests soon followed. This was a symptom of the reciprocal errors in perception that plagued both Iran and the United States in the days to come.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Carter Visits Tehran*

On December 31 and January 1, 1978, Carter paid a brief visit to the shah. About a month before, the leftist and liberal opposition to the shah wrote the UN Secretary-General, Kurt Waldheim, a letter asking that the rule of law be restored in Iran. Prior to its publication on December 22, the group sent the statement and a partial list of the signatories to the Carter administration. There is no mention of this letter by Americans involved in Iran at the time, and this suggests that those who were aware of the letter gave it no significance.<sup>38</sup> Carter's visit was part of a whirlwind tour of three continents.

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<sup>37</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 443; George Lenczowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 187; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 28, 31-32.;

<sup>38</sup> Cottam, *Iran and the United States*, 163. There is no mention of this by either Gary Sick in *All Fall Down* or Brzezinski in *Power and Principle*.

The visit provided the opportunity for the two men to work out a non-proliferation agreement that would accompany the sale of United States nuclear plants to Iran as well as a discussion of Carter's list of Iran's military needs over the next five years. They also discussed the Arab-Israeli question. Iran had been helpful in the past and Carter thought that the shah might again play an important role. The most memorable event was the state dinner and Carter's toast to the shah. The poignant words on human rights written by the Persian poet Saadi were not remembered and little noticed by the press, but Carter's opening words, that Iran was "an island of stability in a turbulent corner of the world" came back to haunt him<sup>39</sup> Although this had been the United States impression of Iran for decades, they came back to trouble Carter, mainly because they described an Iran that would soon be past, and were a disastrous misreading of its future. Less than a month later riots broke out in the holy city of Qom, and a year later the shah was preparing for his "last ride." Carter was aware of the opposition to the shah, but *no one* foresaw how rapidly the "island of stability" would crumble.<sup>40</sup>

### *The Opposition to the Shah*

At the shah's request, there had been little contact between Americans in Iran and the opposition groups. This behavior predated the Carter administration – in fact was institutionalized by the time he came to office. Because everyone thought that the shah was really in control, opposition groups were viewed as nuisance material. The CIA routinely characterized the events as an "irritant," and saw no threat to the shah and the stability of Iran for several years ahead. Hence, there was little information about those

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<sup>39</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 314-323; Richard A. Falk, "Khomeini's Promise, *Foreign Policy* 34 (spring, 1979): 28-34.

<sup>40</sup> Bill and Leiden, *Politics in the Middle East*, 204-205; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 323; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 445-446.

groups as the revolution began. Brzezinski believed the opposition consisted of communists on the left and a few reactionary mullahs on the right. His major understanding of Iran came from his friend Ardeshir Zahedi, Iranian Ambassador to the US. According to James Bill, Brzezinski and Zahedi “spent the last half of 1978 reinforcing one another’s opinions on the situation in Iran.”<sup>41</sup> Carter relied on what Sullivan reported from the embassy, tending to discount some of the sensational reporting by the press. The shah, on the other hand, paid scrupulous attention to the press, looking for evidence that the West was weakening toward him. The nature of the opposition changed after Carter’s election. From 1970-1977 it was characterized by violent acts directed against United States employees in Iran. A new pattern emerged after Carter took office. There was increased pressure on the regime through peaceful means. Lawyers and writers signed declarations protesting censorship and potentially harmful changes to the judiciary. An unsigned copy of one of these was sent to the United States embassy for the first time. Meanwhile students opposed to the regime intensified their opposition at various Iranian universities. They threatened female students at the University of Tehran with death if they continued to eat with male students in the same cafeteria. Students also began to skip classes, and this became so severe that eventually some universities cancelled them altogether. Washington seemed lukewarm to the shah, but he launched a program of “political liberalization” which his opponents perceived as a response to the shah’s concern with either real or anticipated pressures from Carter. At the same time, however, he denounced all dissidents as terrorists or communists.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Bill *The Eagle and the Lion*, 249.

<sup>42</sup> Ramazani, *The United States and Iran*, 92-95.

The media generally played down what had become a persistent pattern of violent acts of bombing, assassination, and surveillance that was directed towards both Iranian and American officials. Although these facts were known worldwide, when they were reported in the United States, they were accompanied by such caveats as “it would be a mistake to assume that dissent is widespread.”<sup>43</sup>

Finally, adding to the misperceptions was the Iranian penchant for conspiracy theories. Simple explanations were never adequate. Iranians were convinced that external forces caused their internal problems. It was all part of a grand scheme, quite understandable to Iranians who had been manipulated repeatedly throughout their history. But to a pragmatic and practical engineer, far removed from any experience of this, they were anathema. This meant that the two men approached problems in different ways. Carter, the engineer, dealt with problems on their own merits, disassembling them into their component parts in order to analyze them. The shah tried to find out what the conspiracy was – and who was behind the plot. So when in April, a pro-Communist faction in overthrew the government in an unexpected and surprising coup, the shah asked Nelson Rockefeller if this meant the United States and the Soviets were dividing the world between them. This was not really an idle question, but reflected the different perceptions and world views of the two sides.<sup>44</sup>

Sporadic demonstrations grew in January of 1978, and it seems clear from what we know now that this was the beginning of the revolution. The government-controlled

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<sup>43</sup> See, for example, *Wall Street Journal*, November 4, 1977.

<sup>44</sup> See Nikki R. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (Yale University Press, 1981) for an explanation of the social and economic transformation of Iran in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which gives insights into the social forces that made the revolution; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 31-33, 36; see also Pahlavi, *Answer to History*, 152; Moens, “President Carter’s Advisers and the Fall of the Shah,” 216; see also Anthony Parsons, *The Pride and the Fall*, (London: Johnathan Cape, 1984.)

press savaged the Ayatollah Khomeini on January 7, one week after Carter's famous toast. Two days later a religious demonstration and march was held in Qom, and the police opened fire, killing a number of students participating in a peaceful demonstration. The ayatollah of Qom denounced the shah as anti-Islamic. Several other demonstrations followed in rapid succession, with the shah's army again firing on unarmed demonstrators. In Shi'i tradition a religious ceremony is held forty days after a death. This set off a series of demonstrations at forty-day intervals throughout much of the year. The rhythm soon became obvious to observers, but the initial violence in Qom was overlooked by embassy and other official reporting until later. Sullivan claims that most people seemed to think they were merely the growing pains of a society that was trying to modernize.<sup>45</sup> Excessive force by the shah played into the mullahs' hands, which began demanding the return of Khomeini from exile. Demonstrations escalated and took on an anti-Western and anti-Semitic character. The stronger the repression, the more power it gave the mullahs to provoke new riots. The shah announced more reforms. He hoped that the program would draw off support of the urban middle class from the more traditionalists elements composed of the fundamentalists and radical leftists. This did not happen. The opposition camp included the secular nationalists as well as the religious traditionalists. Sullivan reported to Vance that the shah should be able to weather the storm until the Iranian economy improved and his liberal reforms began to attract some of the opposition into his camp. Relative calm returned during the summer. The intelligence community was still fairly confident that the shah was not substantially

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<sup>45</sup> Tom Ricks, "Iranian People Challenge Pahlavi Arms and American Support, *MERIP Reports* 68 (June 1978), 18-19; William H. Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1981), 137-142; Ramazani *The United States and Iran*, 126. Ramazani points out that the intelligence community claimed that the shah's regime was stable and would continue with little trouble at least until the mid 1980s. This assessment was made prior to Carter's election and after it.

threatened. A CIA assessment in August 1978 said that Iran “is not in a revolutionary or even a pre-revolutionary situation.”<sup>46</sup> Although the Human Rights Bureau objected, the State Department approved the shipment of crowd-control equipment, in spite of the fact that in the judgment of the ambassador and the experts in the State Department, the CIA and other agencies, as well as foreign governments, the shah was not in serious danger. Some believed that the pro-nationalist sentiment was stronger than the pro-Khomeini loyalty, but in the end it was Khomeini who ruled.<sup>47</sup>

### *The Revolution Takes Hold*

Since there did not seem to be a very great threat to the shah on the horizon, Carter and his advisers focused on several other major policy initiatives – Camp David peace talks, SALT negotiations, and the normalization of relations with China. Rapid progress on these issues strained the decision-making resources. Undivided attention could not be given to any one issue. Besides, no one really believed that the shah could not handle the problem. Thus, no plans were made.<sup>48</sup> Some sources claim that the CIA depended on SAVAK for its intelligence information, and the American embassy had become cautious long before about its intelligence gathering operations among opposition forces, in deference to the shah’s displeasure.<sup>49</sup> Since no one believed the shah was in trouble, no one sounded the alarm. In late summer when the embassy reported that a

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<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 446.

<sup>47</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 325-326; Moens, “President Carter’s Advisers and the Fall of the Shah,” 217; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 446; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 34-35; Richard A. Falk, “One of the Great Watersheds of Modern History,” Interviews on Ayatollah Khomeini, *MERIP Reports* 75/76 (March-April 1979): 9-12; Bill and Leiden, *Politics in the Middle East*, 205-206.

<sup>48</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 358; Moens, “President Carter’s Advisers and the Fall of the Shah,” 217

<sup>49</sup> U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Evaluation, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, “Iran: Evaluation of U.S. Intelligence Performance Prior to November 1978” (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], January 1979), 1-2., See also William Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, 144.

recent clash had visibly shaken the shah; and when several hundred people were machine gunned by the police, Brzezinski began to smell a rat. He relates that Dr. Gary Sick, a very knowledgeable man and his principal assistant for the Iranian crisis, had sent up warning flares several times during 1978, but it had not been a top priority. For example, Sick wrote in April that although the actual threat level to the regime was not clear, there did seem to be a widespread conservative opposition; and that “cracks in the façade of Iranian social stability are becoming difficult to ignore.”<sup>50</sup> Brzezinski now asked for better and more information from various sources, as well as options, but the administration did not step back and take a comprehensive look at the situation.<sup>51</sup>

To make the situation even murkier, conflicting reports about how the shah was personally handling the crisis came in from various visitors as well as the embassy. The assessments varied, and there were few clues as to the reason. One day the shah would be ebullient and confident, the next depressed with no confidence. The shaky situation in Afghanistan preyed on his mind and he believed that the United States was abandoning him and his country to the Soviets, or at least to “a neutral sphere of influence;” and blamed Carter’s human rights policy for aiding his opponents. At the time, no one knew that he was sick with lymphoma, and the treatments he received could possibly account for the mood swings. It would have made a difference in the kinds of assessments made and the policies formulated.<sup>52</sup>

The Carter policy, in the face of the bloody demonstrations, seems unrealistic. The administration pursued a two-pronged approach. It aimed at political liberalization

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<sup>50</sup> Sick, *All Fall Down*, 36; Falk, “Khomeini’s Promise,” 28-34.

<sup>51</sup> Moens, “President Carter’s Advisers and the Fall of the Shah,” 218; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 359-361; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 446-47.

<sup>52</sup> David Harris, *The Crisis*, 19-21; Falk, “Khomeini’s Promise,” 28; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 361; Moens, “President Carter’s Advisers and the Fall of the Shah,” 218.



by the shah, and continued support for him. This was its initial policy after Carter first took office, and it did not change. The fundamental assumption must have been that the shah would be willing and able to compromise at least with the more moderate elements in the opposition. But throughout the crisis, the shah found compromise “unacceptable, and as late as September 1978, according to the *Washington Post*, the CIA’s assessment in secret testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee remained optimistic.”<sup>53</sup>

*The United States Begins to Wake Up—A Nasty October “Surprise”*

Several things began to cluster together in October, 1978. The shah told Sullivan on October 10, 1978 that he was thinking about inviting Khomeini to return to Iran. Sullivan responded that it would be folly to do so without conditions. By September it had become obvious that Khomeini was not only inspiring opposition, he was organizing it. The shah prevailed on the Iraqis to clamp down on him, and in late September they surrounded his residence and limited his freedom of movement. During the first week in October Khomeini fled to Paris. The French government permitted the party to enter after consulting with Iran. Incredibly, the Iranians thought that distance alone would defuse him, because there would no longer be streams of pilgrims traveling to the holy city of Najaf, returning with cassettes of his fiery sermons. This, they believed, would severely curtail his ability to influence events. They underestimated the power of the telephone and the Western press, of which Khomeini became the immediate sweetheart.

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<sup>53</sup> Ramazani, *The United States and Iran*, 129.

They also underestimated Khomeini's charisma and political savvy. This proved to be a fatal mistake.<sup>54</sup>

Problems in the military also began to surface in October. The generals wanted the shah to crack down hard on the opposition before it spread to the troops. At about that same time, the first instance of military sabotage occurred when a helicopter mysteriously exploded. On October 24, 1978 the State Department produced its first comprehensive analysis of the situation for the president. It painted a grim picture. They believed that it was essential for the shah to establish an effective government within a few weeks, or else the military would almost certainly intervene. The analysis was cabled to Sullivan and proposed three basic tracks of United States policy. 1) Firm support for the shah as the key element to transition Iran to a broader based, stable government; 2) strong support for the shah's liberalization effort, including a more active advisory role for the US, along with economic assistance to Iran; 3) opposition to a military regime. It left open the possibility that more contact should be made with Khomeini and the opposition, as well as sending a special envoy to Iran to demonstrate United States support. The paper was explicit in that it stressed the limited ability of the United States to influence events, and the shah's position could ultimately deteriorate in spite of, or even because of, American efforts. The report also expressed concern for the 41,000 Americans in Iran but did not recommend any immediate emergency activities.<sup>55</sup>

Coincidentally, on that same day, Sullivan met with the shah, along with Deputy Secretary of Defense, Charles Duncan. The shah ignored Duncan, cut the meeting short

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<sup>54</sup> For a brief historical review of Khomeini's political thought see J.S. Ismael and Y.Y. Ismail, "Social Change in Islamic Society: The Political Thought of Ayatollah Khomeini, *Social Problems*, 27, (June 1980): 601-619; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 56-58; Parsons, *The Pride and the Fall*, 84-86.

<sup>55</sup> Moens, "President Carter's Advisers and the Fall of the Shah," 219; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 327-328.

with him, and then he and Sullivan were joined by the British ambassador, Sir Anthony Parsons. One option the shah was considering was a military government, but he felt they were too inept. Another was a coalition government, but he had no confidence that it would succeed. He then asked for the views of his guests. The two ambassadors disagreed with the dark picture the shah painted. For most of the country, it was life as usual. They also disagreed with his two proposals. They suggested bringing some of the opposition politicians into the government. The shah said that he would meet with them again in a few days.<sup>56</sup>

Sullivan replied to the State Department's memorandum on October 27. He agreed that military intervention would be a "delayed disaster" but continued deterioration of the situation between then and the following June when elections were scheduled would make the intervention "inevitable." He believed that now was the time for quiet diplomacy, not high level statements of support or a special envoy, and rejected the idea that the United States provide training in crowd control to Iran's military. This could give the military the idea that if they took over they could retain power bloodlessly. Sullivan also rejected any contact with Khomeini. He should be "firmly quarantined. Our destiny is to work with the shah."<sup>57</sup> Sick wrote that any seasoned observer could see what Sullivan was up to. He had his own game plan, and did not need the meddling of Washington. The State Department seemed to accept this, and shelved the report – unfortunately. Not everyone in Washington was in agreement on the issue of a military government, and the paper should have been debated. Just as the State Department began

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<sup>56</sup> Sick, *All Fall Down*, 58-59; Moens, "President Carter's Advisers and the Fall of the Shah," 218; Vance believed that the shah was the best person to judge his political options, see *Hard Choices*, 328.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Sick, *All Fall Down*, 60; Moens, "President Carter's Advisers and the Fall of the Shah," 219; Brezinski, *Power and Principle*, 362.

to lobby more forcefully against a military government, Zbigniew Brzezinski began to argue just the opposite. Vance writes that Brzezinski thought the State Department had given up on the shah and was “soft” on the military option. The situation was quite different from the Camp David issue where there was very close cooperation. Ten months after the disturbances began in Iran, there still had not been a major policy discussion on the subject. This was because of the intense negotiations at Camp David, beginning in September and culminating in March with the peace agreement – precisely the timeframe of the climax of the Iranian revolution. The two sides in the American political divide on Iran never confronted each other.<sup>58</sup>

There is considerable criticism about Brzezinski’s reluctance to raise the issue with the president. He was afraid that it would lead to an American response to the crisis that would undermine the shah. The major evidence for this is the October 24 State Department memorandum. It should have become the basis for a debate, but Brzezinski played the message down, failing to give all the reasonable options a fair hearing. He also failed to bring the very substantial disagreements to the president when there still might have been time to formulate a strong and reasonable policy with some hope of success.<sup>59</sup>

Unexpectedly, Sullivan dropped a bombshell that jump started the decision making process in earnest. On November 2, he sent a cable to Washington asking for instructions within 48 hours. It said that the shah was thinking of stepping down and forming a civilian coalition or military government. He wanted to know what the United States wanted him to do. By this time his options were narrowing. If he wanted to revive

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<sup>58</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 328; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 59-60; the fissures in the thinking between the State Department and the NSC were becoming obvious.

<sup>59</sup> Moens, “President Carter’s Advisers and the Fall of the Shah,” 222.

the old National Front by splitting the secular leadership from the religious, he would have to concede some power to the secular forces to lure them away from Khomeini. This was coming very late in the day. Several National Front leaders had already gone to Paris with a proposal to Khomeini along these lines, suggesting a return to the 1906 constitution which had placed limits on the monarchy. Khomeini would have none of it. The shah had to go. After briefing Carter, Brzezinski called a Special Coordination Committee (SCC) meeting. Brzezinski also consulted with Sullivan, Ardeshir Zahedi, the Iranian ambassador, and Jean Brancois-Poncet, his opposite in Paris. He also got a call from Nelson Rockefeller who concluded that it was urgent to bolster the shah. Because conventional channels were scarce and not necessarily reliable, most offices dealing with Iran developed their own channels of communication, which led to secrecy and distrust. Brzezinski then called Vance just prior to the meeting to get his concurrence on the line that he wanted to adopt. Vance was busy with the Middle East negotiations and could not attend.<sup>60</sup> This set an unfortunate pattern.

#### *The November 2 SCC Meeting*

Those attending the meeting besides Brzezinski were Warren Christopher (deputy secretary of state), Harold Brown, (secretary of defense), General David Jones (chairman Joint Chiefs of staff, General George Brown's successor), Stansfield Turner (director CIA), David Aaron (deputy director NSC), and Gary Sick. Brzezinski had prepared a draft message stating that the United States should send a strong message of support to the shah, urging him to stay on. Second, he should curtail further liberalization efforts until "decisive action to restore order" was accomplished. The United States also hoped

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<sup>60</sup>Parsons, *The Pride and the Fall*, 92-93; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 362-363; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 62-64; Moens, "President Carter's Advisers and the Fall of the Shah," 219;.

that he would resume liberalization policies after order had been restored. Brzezinski disagreed that a civilian government under the shah would be effective, and added that Zahedi agreed with this. However, he said that the United States should support the shah in whatever choice he made. Christopher, supported by Turner, said that Zahedi could not be trusted in this situation to give an objective assessment because he was too close to the shah. Christopher did agree that the United States should indicate strong support for the shah, and that Vance supported this position. He thought that the shah could enhance his position by further reforms, even a civilian coalition government under him. Brown said that if the shah opted for a military government, the United States should urge him to form one under him, not without him. After additional discussion, Brzezinski left the room to telephone the president who approved the general thrust of the message. He also asked Brzezinski to telephone the shah the next day. The message was transmitted to Tehran that night from Brzezinski to Sullivan with only minor changes. It stated that Secretary Vance concurred with the contents. This was given emphasis the following day when Vance, at a press conference, gave a strong statement of the shah's efforts to restore order before moving on to elections or further reforms.<sup>61</sup> So, in the end, few good policy options were forthcoming. There was little reliable information so no one really knew what the shah's chances of surviving were. Also, if he collapsed what should or *could* the United States do? Still smarting from Vietnam, the country had no wish to become heavily involved in another internal rebellion in a Third World country. Vietnam weighed heavily on American foreign policy. Richard Nixon had said that it "grotesquely

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<sup>61</sup> *AFP*, "Replies by the Secretary of State (Vance) to Questions Asked at a News Conference, Washington, DC, November 3, 1978 (Excerpt), Document 331; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 67-68; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 363-364; Moens, "President Carter and the Fall of the Shah," 220. Moens comments that at that time Brzezinski was the only one of the president's advisers to advocate force to restore order; Lenczowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East*, 194.

distorted it.” Many in Washington political circles were hostile to the shah, despising his SAVAK and his human rights abuses. The president’s own views on human rights and the abuse of power, as well as his personal morality, set outer limits on the range of realistic policy options. It was simply not morally or politically viable, in other words it was not prudent, to actively support bloody repression of the opposition. The sense of paralysis was not limited to the US. The British, French, and Israeli governments neither changed their policies nor offered new initiatives until it was too late.<sup>62</sup>

#### *The White House and the State Department*

The erosion of mutual confidence between the White House and the State Department hampered effective policy formulation. Henry Precht, the country director for Iranian affairs in the State Department was one of the first to conclude that the shah was unlikely to survive the revolution. He also believed that the moderate constitutionalists of the National Front, long the voices for democracy and human rights, would replace him. With these two assessments, he concluded that United States continued support for the shah was wrong. The policy would alienate the very people who would replace the shah. He was convinced that Brzezinski was the “malevolent force thwarting him at every turn.”<sup>63</sup> The NSC, of course, had the opposite view. This tended to choke off effective discussion between the two entities at the staff level. Brzezinski took a very hard line toward the opposition, assuring the shah of full United States support. Vance was more ambiguous, but he was absent for much of the time. A pattern was set by his absence at the November 2 meeting; although he communicated regularly

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<sup>62</sup> Charles Kurzman, “Structural Opportunity and Perceived Opportunity in Social-Movement Theory: The Iranian Revolution of 1979, *American Sociological Review* 61 (February 1996): 153; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 67; See also Geoff Simons, *Vietnam Syndrome*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998) for a discussion of the aftereffects of the Vietnam War on the US.

<sup>63</sup> Sick, *All Fall Down*, 69. Precht was a good friend of Sick, having worked together in the past.

with the president and Brzezinski, he never attended policy meetings, usually delegating his authority to Warren Christopher. Vance was deeply engaged with several initiatives and had a very full plate. Sick points out that the rivalry between Vance and Brzezinski was still muted in the second year of Carter's presidency, and when Vance chose to assert himself he enjoyed a great deal of influence.<sup>64</sup> On Iran, at first his and Brzezinski's positions were not terribly far apart, but as time wore on they split apart radically. This seems inevitable because of their divergent views on East-West issues, something that was bound to come into the equation sooner or later with the Soviet's meddling in Afghanistan and its adventurism on the Horn of Africa. In the meantime, Vance's and Brzezinski's image of the Soviet threat still *seemed* to converge.<sup>65</sup> The emerging differences in views were not evident because Vance simply removed himself from the day-to-day discussions. Vance disassociated himself with those at the State Department who asserted that the shah was finished. In his memoirs he said that "an estrangement grew up between the White House and my key advisers."<sup>66</sup> Henry Precht and those who agreed with his position were continuously frustrated. Without Vance's strong support they could not argue their case at the highest levels. And Vance's absence from the day-to-day policy making automatically left the playing field to Brzezinski. Brzezinski never shrank from controversy; in fact he thrived on it. So it did not disturb him at all that he

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<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Richard C. Thornton's untitled review of *The Presidency of James Earl Carter*, in *Political Science Quarterly* 108 (autumn 1993): 560-62 in which he observes that Vance's influence was high on those issues which *he chose to involve himself* (emphasis added).

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Garrison, "Framing Foreign Policy Alternatives in the Inner Circle, 775-807; see also Jerel A. Rosati, "Continuity and Change in the Foreign Policy Beliefs of Political Leaders: Addressing the Controversy over the Carter Administration," *Political Psychology* 9, (September 1988): 471-505.

<sup>66</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 328; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 69-71.



became an object of personal animosity by some.<sup>67</sup> George Ball was horrified by Brzezinski's "bureaucratic imperialism." He consistently bested Vance, and never accepted defeat as final or a policy as it was decided if it did not please him. He hired a press secretary to promote himself as the spokesman for United States foreign policy.<sup>68</sup>

### *The Message to the Shah*

Brzezinski believed that the message of November 2 to the shah was weak and ambiguous. It was, in part because of his own maneuvering. Then he began implementing policy. With Carter's permission he telephoned the shah the next day and tried subtly to tilt American support toward military action to squelch the unrest. He promised the shah that the United States would back him to the hilt, in whatever action he chose. This compromised Brzezinski. When the national security adviser tries to personally run various agencies or transmit the president's wishes, it poisons the process. He can no longer be counted on to convey information in an evenhanded way.<sup>69</sup> The entire thing left the shah confused and baffled. He couldn't see what the president could do in tangible terms; and he felt that public statements of support for him by Washington were becoming counter-productive. Obviously, he was referring to Vance's press conference. The statement, Brzezinski's telephone call, and the formal message were intended to show that the United States government spoke with one voice, and that the policy message of November 2 had the full authority of the United States government behind it. The shah continued with his uncoordinated efforts at liberalization and

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<sup>67</sup> For a rather unflattering assessment of Brzezinski see Robert D. Schulzinger, "Foreign Policy," *American Quarterly* 35½, (spring-summer, 1983): 39-58; Elizabeth Drew, "A Reporter at Large (Zbigniew Brzezinski)," *The New Yorker*, May 1, 1978, 90-130; Parsons, *The Pride and the Fall*, 96-97; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 72.

<sup>68</sup> See George W. Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern: Memoirs* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 457-458; Hodding Carter III, "Life Inside the Carter State Department – Memoir," *Playboy*, February 1981, 214.

<sup>69</sup> Moens, "President Carter's Advisers and the Fall of the Shah, 223.

crackdowns. The Prime Minister, Sharif-Emami, sent a message to Sullivan telling him bluntly that the shah was incapable of making any decisions and appealed for advice. By November 5 the prime minister had concluded that the establishment of a military government was essential. The shah's contacts with the National Front leadership had convinced him that this was the only solution. On November 6 the shah appointed a military government, half of whose membership were civilians. It announced more reforms, released political prisoners, and arrested the head of SAVAK. This sent the message to the revolutionaries that the shah was "on the run" and sent the message to his high ranking officials that it was every man for himself. The shah's announcement of the changes was conciliatory. This surprised those in Washington who were advocates for a military government. The announcement did not bode well for a strong crackdown, but not many saw that; neither did Washington see that a moderate coalition government was possible. Zahedi, Iran's ambassador, edited out those parts of the speech that the hardliners did not want to hear. The remainder of November settled into an uneasy and partial calm. However, much of December was the Shiite holy month and many feared that this could bring more unrest. When it became obvious that there would be no strong military crackdown, the opposition gathered their strength for another round. The religious leaders would play a "central and pivotal role," putting together an organization that was viable from one end of the country to the other.<sup>70</sup>

### *Unintelligent Intelligence*

On November 6 a policy Review Committee meeting (PRC) was held to review the situation in Iran. It was the only one to be chaired by Vance. He said that the

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<sup>70</sup>James A. Bill, "Power and Religion in Revolutionary Iran," *The Middle East Journal* 36 (winter 1982): 22; Moens, "President Carter's Advisers and the Fall of the Shah," 220-221.

president wanted more and better information, and Brzezinski agreed. Turner pointed out that intelligence gathering was difficult in Iran for fear of upsetting the shah if he discovered it.<sup>71</sup> Brzezinski believed that the purpose of the meeting was to reassert State's control over the Iranian issue. The State Department focused on the evacuation of Americans from the country. That, Brzezinski believed, would be a fatal signal from the US. Charles Duncan, deputy secretary of defense, who had recently returned from Iran, suggested again that the United States provide crowd control equipment to the Iranian military. Brzezinski claims that "Vance put him off," and this made matters worse. Sick, on the other hand, says that Vance replied that the United States was already providing tear gas and other non-lethal equipment, that there were statutory restrictions in place on sending these sorts of things, and that the British were filling the gap. Duncan was not satisfied and asked that the State Department question Sullivan on it.<sup>72</sup>

A barometer of the political health in Iran was the amount of oil production. It had fallen badly, and there was a shortfall of four million barrels per day at that time because of striking oil workers. If the government did not reverse this, it would not survive. Dissatisfied, Brzezinski sent his own emissary to Iran to assess the situation. (He informed the State Department of this.) Then he spoke with Carter, informing him of the deplorable state of United States intelligence. Subsequently Carter sent a note to

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<sup>71</sup> See, for example, Stansfield Turner and George Thibault, "Intelligence: The Right Rules," *Foreign Policy* 48, (autumn 1982): 122-138 for an explanation why situations such as this usually pose unacceptable risks; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 90-91.

<sup>72</sup> Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 438; Khosrow Fatemi, "The Iranian Revolution: Its Impact on Economic Relations with the United States," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12 (November 1980): 304; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 78-79; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 366-367; 220.

Brzezinski, Vance, and Turner, asking for better information.<sup>73</sup> It was the chaos in the oil industry that contributed substantially to the shah's fall.<sup>74</sup>

While the American embassy had reported surface facts on the day to day situation in Iran, there was little digging beneath the surface. Non-official news reports and rumors were explained away as distortions. The House of Representatives Select Committee on Intelligence initiated a comprehensive investigation in November 1978 and produced a public report in January 1979. The study concluded that intelligence *was* weak; that there were no challenges to the confidence that policymakers had placed in the shah; and that this skewed the United States perception of the situation.<sup>75</sup> The CIA's batting average was zero. On November 22 the CIA circulated a report that claimed that the shah was "not paralyzed with indecision," and was in "accurate touch with reality." His vacillation was his attempt to deal with a situation that had no clear solution. So, the shah was coping as long as he failed to make up his mind!<sup>76</sup>

*"Thinking the Unthinkable"*

Washington received a cable from Sullivan on November 9 titled "Thinking the Unthinkable." In it, Sullivan speculated on what might happen if the shah should leave. He then set forth a series of propositions and assertions that might influence accommodations in the future if this indeed was the case. These became a starting point.

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<sup>73</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 367; Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 438. Prados relates that Turner believed Brzezinski, who had already restricted his access to the president, was behind the note. Turner says that just the week before, the president had complimented him on the intelligence gathering operations of the CIA. See also Lenczowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East*, 191.

<sup>74</sup> R.K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran*: 202-204.

<sup>75</sup> U.S. House. Subcommittee on Evaluation, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Staff Report, "Iran: Evaluation of U.S. Intelligence Performance Prior to November 1978."

<sup>76</sup> Ramazani, *The United States and Iran*, 119-130; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 92-93. see also Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions*.

- The military was anti-Communist, and many younger officers had a Western tilt. It would need to maintain its integrity.
- Despite noises that the West was stealing Iranian oil, in order for Iran's economy to survive it had to continue the relationship.
- The clerics would find the military useful because there were no Islamic instruments to maintain law and order.
- If that were the case and there was a military-clerical accommodation then Khomeini would return to Iran and hold a "Ghandi-like" position.
- Khomeini would have to choose a political leader that was acceptable to the military.

Thus, there was a chance that non-communist, moderate political figures would emerge that could call for elections to a constituent assembly which would draw up a moderate Islamic constitution that could be pro-Western and would maintain Iran's general international tilt. Sullivan thought that the relationship could be a satisfactory one. But he cautioned that in order for this to work, every step along the way had to turn out well. He then went on to say that the existing United States policy of supporting the shah, along with the military, believing that he could face down the threats, was "obviously the only safe course to pursue at this juncture." He cautioned that "if it should fail and if the shah should abdicate, we need to think the unthinkable at this time in order to give our thoughts some precision should the unthinkable contingency arise." These events would be required to achieve an outcome that would be compatible with United States national interest on the one hand and its democratic values on the other – power and principle.

Brzezinski believed that the cable strengthened the State Department's position.<sup>77</sup> In any event, in the months that followed, none of these assumptions proved true. It seemed that no one could match the fervor of Khomeini's religious movement. Comparing him to Ghandi was simply wishful thinking. Any steps to ease the shah and his senior military command out of the way would have been spotted for what they were, in Tehran as well as Washington. This was not a shift the United States wanted to make, and Sullivan made no strong case for doing it. The United States still assumed that the shah could act vigorously and with authority, another straw of wishful thinking. Further, Sullivan's assertion that *every* intermediate step had to work put a damper on the whole idea. Few things are perfect. The cable did not stir things up in Washington; it was simply considered to be a veiled attack on United States policy, and, according to some, further eroded Sullivan's credibility. Sullivan, however, says that the cable did cause some consternation in Washington, mainly because it was the first report to Carter that the shah might not survive. Carter made some notations and sent the cable on to Vance, Brzezinski, Brown, and Turner wanting to know why he had not been informed. The cable, along with the notes, was leaked to the press, and bureaucrats scrambled to deflect any blame from themselves.<sup>78</sup> Again, bureaucratic infighting prevented any coherent policy for emerging. Sullivan made contact with the opposition and began to negotiate with them, in direct contradiction of United States policy.<sup>79</sup>

. This might have been the time when strong action in bringing this cable into the conversations could have saved the day. At the time, Carter was closer to the Vance's

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<sup>77</sup> William H. Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, 201-202; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 369; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 329; Lenczowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East*, 195.

<sup>78</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 329-330; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 368; William H. Sullivan, *Mission in Iran*, 203-204.

<sup>79</sup> Sick, 159-60; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 362; Lenczowski, 196.

view of the situation than to Brzezinski's, yet he wanted the shah to survive. He was faced with a difficult set of contradictions. Being responsible for a probable bloodbath in Iran, which was essentially what Brzezinski advocated, at least in the short run, was repugnant to Carter. Vance opposed such use of force on principle as well, and many on his staff agreed.<sup>80</sup> Carter was deeply and personally involved in Camp David talks at the time (his heart was in the Holy Land), so the debates over the contradictions did not take place. But the failure to seriously discuss Iran falls, according to some critics, mainly (not completely) to his advisers, especially the national security adviser for not pressuring the president to face the issue more squarely.<sup>81</sup>

On November 18, the United States received a message from the Soviet leader, Leonid I. Brezhnev, warning the United States to stay out of the internal affairs of Iran. The tenor of the reply became the subject of a bitter argument between Brzezinski and Vance. By now their disagreements had reached a bitter level and would dominate American foreign policy for more than a year. The note itself signaled a shift in the Soviet position. It had previously been extremely cautious, and had developed a good relationship with the shah. Now, it appeared that they were shifting and beginning to support the revolutionaries.<sup>82</sup>

### *The Situation Worsens*

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<sup>80</sup> Moens, "The Carter Presidency and the Fall of the Shah," 221; see also Jerel Rosati, *The Carter Administration's Quest for Global Community* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), 112-113; see also Rosati, "Continuity and Change in the Foreign Policy Beliefs of Political Leaders," 471-505.

<sup>81</sup> Moens, "The Carter Presidency and the Fall of the Shah," 222; David K. Hall, "Implementing Multiple Advocacy in the National Security Council: 1947-1980" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1982), 717-720, 724. See also Alexander Moens, *Foreign Policy Under Carter: Testing Multiple Advocacy Decision Making* (Boulder, CO.: Westview, 1990.)

<sup>82</sup> See Alvin Z. Rubinstein, "The Soviet Union and Iran under Khomeini, *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) 57 (autumn 1981): 599-617; Lenczowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East*, 196.

Religious celebrations of Moharram, a holy time for shi'a, began on December 1, and both Washington and Tehran began preparing for what most believed would be the final showdown between the military government and the religious forces – a kind of Armageddon. By this time contact had increased with some of the opposition. They were nervous about the possibility of a bloodbath during Moharram. In meetings at the United States embassy they proposed to form a Regency Council, composed of nationally respected leaders, have the shah step back – perhaps go on a vacation – and then the council would appoint a coalition government on a temporary basis until elections could be held. The US, however, said that only the shah could agree to this. The effort came to naught anyway because Khomeini refused to support it. Instead, he incited more trouble, saying that the month of Moharram would be the time when “blood will triumph over the sword, the month of the strength of right, the month the oppressors will be judged and the satanic government will be abolished.”<sup>83</sup> Massive riots and a general strike ensued. The moderates distanced themselves from any notion of a coalition government. The shah arrested several of their leaders, then backed away and released them as their incarceration sparked more riots.<sup>84</sup> Sullivan complained that there was no guidance from either the State Department or Washington in general.<sup>85</sup>

#### *New Ideas or Same Old Thing?*

At the end of November, Secretary of the Treasury Michael Blumenthal, visited Tehran and reported that the shah looked overwhelmed and anxious and needed American help. Brzezinski subsequently agreed that an outside observer should be called in. The man for the job was George Ball, a senior official at the State Department during

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<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Sick, *All Fall Down*, 101.

<sup>84</sup> Ramazani, *The United States and Iran*, 115-118; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 105.

<sup>85</sup> William H. Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, 204.



the Kennedy years. Gary Sick was to work with him full time. It quickly became clear to Sick that Ball would provide fresh insights, but they would not be what Brzezinski wanted to hear. An unfortunate piece of journalism appeared at an inopportune time. Robert Moss, a British journalist wrote a widely read and widely believed article that the Russians were behind the trouble in Iran. Many people thought the mullahs were too obtuse to organize the demonstrations and unrest. The article reached the status of a major document in United States policy, and played into Brzezinski's hands. Also, concern was growing about the large contingent of Americans in Iran. United States companies began to quietly send dependents home, but the official United States community stayed put lest they begin a stampede and a panic. A chance letter to the editor of the *Washington Star* brought matters to a head. Written by the wife of an American military official in Tehran, she complained that dependents were hostage to United States policy because they could leave Iran only at their own expense. Ball used the letter to argue for the reduction of the American presence. Ball found a great deal of support for this throughout the various agencies, but Sullivan and Brzezinski both opposed it. A policy developed that allowed official dependents the option of quietly coming home on a paid holiday.

Although he was sympathetic to the shah, Ball was aware that the regime was almost certainly doomed. He thought that it was time to establish some sort of transition mechanism that would favor the moderates. Ball did not believe that the shah should form a new government; it would not be credible. Instead, his idea was that the United States should compile a list of individuals who were respected but not extremist. Then, with the list in hand, the United States could ask the shah to convene a Council of

Notables who would choose a government. The shah would necessarily have to back away and relinquish some power, but would be a constitutional monarch. Sullivan thought this was unrealistic; and he also still opposed a more active United States intervention.<sup>86</sup> At about this time, Vance learned that Brzezinski had opened up private channels of communication with Tehran and was talking with Ardeshir Zahedi, the Iranian ambassador without anyone in the State Department knowing about it (although Carter had approved it). He believed that this contributed to the confusion of the shah on where he stood; and it widened the breach between Vance and Brzezinski. Vance went to see him to have it out. When confronted with the accusation, Brzezinski denied it. Vance wanted Brzezinski to go to the president with him. The three met and Carter asked if this were true. Brzezinski again denied it. That was the last Vance heard of the matter, but the back-channel communication seemed to stop.<sup>87</sup>

### *The Press*

Also in the meantime, the president made a costly mistake. In a breakfast meeting with reporters his desire for openness and candor opened a hole before him which he walked into. In response to a question, Carter gave an accurate assessment of the situation in Iran, and said that he hoped that the “shah maintain a major role in the government, but that is a decision for the Iranian people to make.” This was the wrong time; it was interpreted to mean that the United States was abandoning the shah.<sup>88</sup>

Further meetings put into sharp relief the split between Ball’s position and Brzezinski’s.

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<sup>86</sup> Prados, *Keeper of the Keys*, 441; Sullivan *Mission to Iran*, 221-222; Ramazani, *The United States and Iran*, 131; Bill *The Eagle and the Lion*, 252.

<sup>87</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 328; see also Lenczowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East*, 196. See also Bill *The Eagle and the Lion*, 249-241. Bill claims that it was Brzezinski who turned Carter against Sullivan, and only Vance’s intervention kept Carter from firing him on the spot.

<sup>88</sup> Ledeen and Lewis, *Debacle*, 164; Moens, “President Carter’s Advisers and the Fall of the Shah,” 225.

Ball believed in a council of notables, a constitutional monarchy, with a shah who would not use military means to consolidate his position. Vance agreed. Brzezinski argued for a military government and a severe crackdown on the opposition. Brown took a middle position, only arguing that the military was fast becoming the most important factor in the equation. Brzezinski prepared a memorandum for Carter, outlining the proposals. He was now sorry he had ever invited Ball. Carter liked Ball's proposal, but was reluctant to support anything that might indicate he did not support the shah. Brzezinski thought that he or Schlesinger should go to Iran in person, something that Ball strongly disagreed with. Ball thought that this was the worst idea he had ever heard, and was able to convince Carter that a visit by such a high level American at this juncture would signal American interference. He also informed Vance that Brzezinski, through Zahedi, who by this time had returned to Iran to advise the shah, was pressuring the shah for a crackdown. He pushed Vance to become more involved in the decision making process because Brzezinski had an overly optimistic view of the shah's survivability. He thought that Brzezinski was not giving several advocates in the State Department a fair hearing.<sup>89</sup>

### *The Collapse*

The shah was not enthused about any Council of Notables. Neither was Sullivan, who discussed it with him. The shah suggested that he might form a civilian government composed of members of the National Front, while he himself would maintain control of the military. Although he had made overtures to the National Front, they were by this time in touch with Khomeini in Paris, who refused all overtures. All of this was overlaid by a massive strike in a variety of state offices, including the oil fields and banks.

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<sup>89</sup> Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 461-475; Lencazwski, 196; Moens, "President Carter's Advisers and the Fall of the Shah," 226; Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 253.

Meanwhile, the shah asked, what did the United States want him to do?<sup>90</sup> One thing was certain, a repressive government with nothing in the way of fundamental reform was not going to work. But subordinates who defied Brzezinski could land in hot water.

Meanwhile, and coincidentally, Henry Precht proposed his option to Brzezinski. He believed that there was no longer any but a marginal chance that the shah was going to survive and laid out a series of steps that the United States could take to protect its interests. He knew nothing about the Council of Notables that the Ball report suggested; but he, also, thought that a committee of notables to work out a solution was desirable. The United States could play the role of midwife. Precht sent his ideas to Sullivan as well, and did not know that Sullivan was reluctant to embrace it. But no one really knew Sullivan's real position and attitude toward the shah. Staff level people were not given critical information at the critical time. Nothing circulated below the level of assistant secretary. Support for the shah was so ingrained that even a modest suggestion of doubt was tantamount to treason in the inner circles. Nothing changed. The two recommendations were simply ignored. Brzezinski later denied that there was any overt call for the abandonment of the shah; and Henry Precht was subsequently barred from SCC meetings.<sup>91</sup> Brzezinski later denied that there was any overt call for the abandonment of the shah; and Henry Precht was subsequently barred from SCC meetings.

The shah had some proposals of his own, which mirrored the split in Washington on the best path to take. One was a coalition government with the National Front,

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<sup>90</sup> Lenczowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East*, 190-191; Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, 222.

<sup>91</sup> Lenczowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East*, 192-193; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 120-122; Prados, *Keeper of the Keys*, 441. Moen's interview with Brzezinski, May 12, 1989 in Moen, "President Carter's Advisers and the Fall of the Shah," 227.

another was to follow Ball's proposal, the third was the Iron Fist – a severe crackdown. He wanted United States backing on that one, however.<sup>92</sup> No new ideas, no movement, just more discussion. A meeting on December 28 among Vance, Brzezinski, Brown, Turner, and Schlesinger yielded no progress. There was still the basic split – support the shah at all costs, no communication with the opposition, give the shah the freedom to decide his own course, including the Iron Fist (the name for a harsh crackdown). The other side said no Iron Fist, yes to a coalition government. They believed that the military would probably disintegrate if it tried to enforce a crackdown. Since Carter was at Camp David, they decided once again on a compromise message to Sullivan. Once again Brzezinski tried to subtly tilt it toward the Iron Fist solution. The message said that the United States preferred a coalition government, but if there was any doubt as to its underlying orientation or its ability to govern, or if the army was in danger of fragmentation, “then a firm military government under the shah may be unavoidable.”<sup>93</sup> Vance then took the message to Carter at Camp David. This time, Vance did an end-run around Brzezinski. He and Carter changed the part of the message after reference to the danger of the military's disintegration to read “...then the Shah should choose without delay a firm military government which would end the disorder, violence and bloodshed. If in his judgment the Shah believed these alternatives to be infeasible, then a regency council supervising the military government might be considered by him.” Vance relates that the shah had to see that the United States would support a military government to end

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<sup>92</sup> Parsons, *The Pride and the Fall*, 150; William H. Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, 193. See also William H. Sullivan “Living Without Marcos, *Foreign Policy* 53 (winter 1983-1984), 150-156. Sullivan criticizes Carter for remaining loyal to the shah long after “it was apparent that the leader would fall.” He also criticizes Brzezinski for remaining committed to the Iron Fist to “crush a revolution that had already succeeded.” Sullivan himself, however, sent unclear and, in some cases, wrong information according to Carter.

<sup>93</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 332-333.

the bloodshed, but not to increase it with the Iron Fist just to save his throne.<sup>94</sup> The shah failed to see that the message provided him with any guidance. He asked Sullivan again if he should leave. Sullivan said he had no instructions on that, but he was sure the shah would be welcome in the US. The same day, December 29, the shah asked a National Front Leader, Shatour Bakhtiar to form a civilian government. He also said that he might leave Iran for a “vacation.” Bakhtiar insisted on this. The shah still agonized over the Iron Fist solution. It was now clear that it was in the United States interests for the shah to leave the country, but Brzezinski still hedged.<sup>95</sup>

When Bakhtiar accepted the shah’s offer on January 2, 1979, other National Front leaders broke with him and joined the Khomeini camp. Khomeini attacked Bakhtiar as vigorously as he had the shah, so there were more riots, demonstrations, and strikes. The shah began to waffle. He toyed with the idea of keeping significant power for himself. Sullivan cabled Washington to this effect. He concluded that the Bakhtiar government probably would not succeed and the United States should open direct contact with Khomeini and try to secure some sort of deal that would salvage United States influence in the future. Brzezinski remained firm in his belief in the shah’s staying power; and Sullivan remained frustrated with Brzezinski’s failure to ease out the shah.<sup>96</sup>

At a meeting on January 3 of the full NSC, including Carter, Vance “predictably” leaned in favor of asking the shah to step aside. Brzezinski suggested that if the United States asked him to do this it could cause problems in the future, perhaps civil war. By now Carter had decided. He believed that the Bakhtiar government had a better chance

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<sup>94</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 333.

<sup>95</sup> Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions*, 238; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 376-377. Parsons, *Pride and Fall*, 121.

<sup>96</sup> William H. Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, 225-226.

of surviving if the shah left. He said the United States would phrase the request as if the shah had already made the decision, and Washington was simply playing the supporting role. He also felt that there was a chance that Khomeini's and Bakhtiar's relationship might improve.<sup>97</sup> The administration's support of the Bakhtiar government was probably premature. Khomeini was offering good relations with the United States at the same time; but there were two conditions attached. First, the United States had to withdraw support from the shah, and second, noninterference in Iran's internal affairs. The latter meant withdrawing support from Bakhtiar.<sup>98</sup>

Since the integrity of the military was still a key element, the administration decided to send a top military official to Tehran to provide support for it. General Robert Huyser (deputy to Alexander Haig, American NATO commander) would go.<sup>99</sup> But there were still differences within the administration that hampered their efforts to manage the crisis. Vance and Brzezinski disagreed on whether the United States should make contact with Khomeini, something Sullivan advocated – Vance yes, Brzezinski no. Carter originally sided with Brzezinski, but then in the middle of January told the United States embassy in Paris to make contact with Khomeini. The talks never led to any agreement, and then Sullivan criticized Carter's decision, saying it was insane<sup>100</sup>. It was reported in Washington that Sullivan had already contacted Khomeini's assistants. What, exactly, was Sullivan about? Carter lost faith in him and considered firing him; and he probably should have. His reports were full of inaccuracies, which Carter later discovered and he

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<sup>97</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 451. Bakhtiar thought that the Americans played a "disgusting game." See Shahpur Bakhtiar: "The Americans Played a Disgusting Role," *MERIP Reports* 104, "Khomeini and the Opposition," (March-April 1982): 11-14.

<sup>98</sup> Ramazani, *The United States and Iran*, 132.

<sup>99</sup> Falk, "Khomeini's Promise," 28-34. Falk argues that Huyser played an "ominous and interventionary role," which signaled that top United States officials endorsed the use of firepower to break up demonstrations.

<sup>100</sup> William H. Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, 226.

seemed obsessed with getting the shah out of Iran immediately. Sullivan also reported that Brzezinski was trying to get Huyser to push the military into an attempted coup. Vance warned him not to follow any “unauthorized communications.” Brzezinski and Schlesinger thought the time had come to implement Huyser’s third instruction: to restore order by military force. Carter would have none of it. Just as his faith eroded in Sullivan, it eroded also in Brzezinski.<sup>101</sup> Huyser’s mission set up another independent line of communication, he with Harold Brown, Sullivan with Vance. There were conflicting reports, further hamstringing Carter. The decision-making process was in shambles.<sup>102</sup> And by this time, the personal relations between Vance and Brzezinski were so bad that they distorted the entire process.<sup>103</sup>

The shah was scheduled to leave Iran on January 16. Instead of coming directly to the US, he decided to spend a few days at Aswan in response to an invitation from Anwar Sadat. This change of plans disrupted the complex arrangements already made for his arrival in America. The last minute equivocation complicated the problem of giving the shah and his entourage safe haven. The problem was not limited to the United States; he became a political liability on several governments, and finally entered the United States under quite different circumstances. This triggered the second great crisis in United States Iranian relations. Shortly before noon on January 16 the shah boarded an airplane at Mehrabad Airport and began his “last ride.” A regency council took over his duties.

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<sup>101</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 452; William H. Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, 214; Ledeen and Lewis, *Debacle*, 168; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 140; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 338.

<sup>102</sup> Ramazani, *United States and Iran*, 139; Falk “Khomeini’s Promise,” says that the policy seemed to be to hold on to the hated shah at any cost. See p. 29.

<sup>103</sup> Lenczowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East*, 196; Moens, “President Carter’s Advisers and the Fall of the Shah,” 230.



*In The Aftermath of the Shah*

By the end of January events further outstripped the administration's ability to influence them. There was a real possibility of a military coup, which could have led to disastrous results. Warren Zimmerman met with a Khomeini official, Ibrahim Yazdi, who strongly emphasized this. Speaking for Khomeini he urged the United States to do everything possible to prevent this. The Iranian people would never accept that the United States was not behind it, which would radicalize the situation and lead to more violence against Americans. Carter believed, and Sullivan concurred, that the *threat* of a military coup would be the most effective tool in buying time for the Bakhtiar government. Zimmerman and Yazdi met again and Yazdi outlined a future policy of nonalignment and no military buildup. He stressed that future relations with the United States could be cordial provided the United States stopped interfering in Iranian affairs. The Islamic revolution would restore stability, revitalize agriculture with possible help from the US, and would sell oil to whoever wanted to buy it, except Israel and South Africa. There was no plan to spread the revolution. A deceptive calm descended on Tehran.<sup>104</sup>

Differences of opinion still haunted American policymakers. Sullivan had burned his bridges, and was open in his contempt of Bakhtiar and thought the military was a paper tiger. Senior level diplomats at the State Department, including Vance, believed the Iranian government had a chance. Every official pronouncement by the administration was immediately followed by leaks from "informed sources." Whatever opportunity

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<sup>104</sup> Lenczowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East*, 198; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 142-145; again Falk is critical of the administration because the new oil policy was not in United States interests, and therefore was not a good replacement. See "Khomeini's Promise," 30.

there was to work out a deal with Khomeini eroded by the day. The military situation continued to deteriorate.<sup>105</sup>

### *Khomeini Returns*

Khomeini returned to Iran on February 1 and set up an alternative government. Bakhtiar had to go because he had received his mandate from the shah. The showdown lasted until February 11 when the army ordered its troops back into the barracks and Bakhtiar fled the country. Military action was subsequently dropped by the United States as a viable option. Carter publicly supported the Bakhtiar government until February 5. After that, the Americans concentrated on protecting the embassy and getting their own out of the country. The American embassy in Tehran sent a long message on February 11 summarizing the events. The concluding sentence was ‘Army surrenders; Khomeini wins. Destroying all classified.’ The revolution was complete.<sup>106</sup> The worst was yet to come.

### CONCLUSIONS

The shah must a great deal of blame in the collapse of the Iranian government and his subsequent flight. Indecisive from the beginning, he became a pathetic, paralyzed shell of a leader, interested only in himself. He never trusted Carter, and was disappointed when he was elected. Carter’s policies of upholding human rights, coupled with a prudent arms sales program, made the shah suspicious that the United States wanted to drop him. Conspiracy suspicions played a significant role in Iran – they believed that any important event in the country was probably inspired by foreigners. The brutal debate in Congress over the sale of AWACS to Iran further eroded his

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<sup>105</sup> William H. Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, 236; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 142-146.

<sup>106</sup> Moens, “President Carter’s Advisers and the Fall of the Shah,” 231; Quoted in Gary Sick, *All Fall Down*, 156

confidence in the Carter administration. Although the shah had legitimacy in his own eyes, as king,<sup>107</sup> he was viewed as just another ruthless dictator by others. In the end he failed to gain legitimacy in the eyes of his people. By December 1978 he was enclosed in a dreamlike cocoon, incapable of even making a clean getaway. His White Revolution never delivered on democracy at any level, leaving a gap in expectations which caused political decay.<sup>108</sup>

The shah's response to his opposition was inconsistent. He alternated between severe and lethal repression on the one hand and conciliation on the other. He alienated many different groups representing much of the Iranian population. One segment hated the fact that he seemed to be in the pocket of the United States. Religious enthusiasts abhorred the secular reforms. Those benefiting from those reforms wanted more political participation, but did not get it.

Although the signs were clear in hindsight that there was trouble brewing, the United States entered the revolutionary scene almost nine to ten months after the riots began in Qom and Tabriz. The shah's reaction to the events signaled a business as usual attitude. This was a tragic mistake. United States policy was two pronged -- supporting the shah and promoting the liberalization efforts; and the administration failed to see that they contradicted each other. A central problem for Carter was the incoherence within his own government. No one in the Carter administration foresaw the dire picture. No one thought the shah's fall was inevitable. It failed to understand the opposition and bet on the wrong faction among the political forces. It also placed too much stock on the norms

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<sup>107</sup> See Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi, *Mission for My Country* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961).

<sup>108</sup> See Samuel P. Huntington, "Political Development and Decay," *World Politics* 27 (April 1965): 386-430.

of give and take, and the ability to negotiate and compromise in Iranian culture.<sup>109</sup>

Nevertheless, even when the administration saw that Iran was slipping, all it could do was to look at the options. There were only two that surfaced, both of them bad. The first option, supported by Vance and others, was to encourage the shah to make political reforms and liberalize the regime. When the reforms failed to quash the protests, a proposal for a civilian government with or without the shah was offered. The Council of Notables was another variation on that theme. The second option, supported at first only by Brzezinski, but later by Schlesinger, Hamilton Jordan, and Jody Powell, suggested a violent military crackdown to stop the revolt. Reforms were to be put on hold. Harold Brown became sympathetic to this option, but had little faith in the Iranian military and its ability to stop the unrest. Carter, Vance, and Mondale never supported this Iron Fist approach. Carter never accepted fully the first option either. He wanted reforms but did not want to undermine the shah.<sup>110</sup> Also, he hesitated to come right out and tell the shah what to do. He really did not want to meddle in the internal affairs of Iran. This complicated his position, but he never knew that the shah was incapable of logical decision making by 1978. The shah's sickness was still a secret. Also, Washington did not read the shah well, and vice versa. It had rescued him in 1953, and the shah might have expected this again; but it was no longer 1953. A third option was put forth towards the end of the crisis by Henry Precht and Ambassador Sullivan: unload the shah and form a relationship with Khomeini. Dropping the shah was as difficult for Carter as approving

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<sup>109</sup> Ramazani, *The United States and Iran*, 139; see Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 216-218 for a description of the clues that were visible in the economic system which should have alerted the administration to the possibility of political collapse.

<sup>110</sup> See LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, for a discussion of the dilemma the United States faces as it searches for reform and stability in the world. Also see Schmitz, *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1965-1989*.

the Iron Fist; and Carter can and should be criticized for supporting the *man* too much. The effort by the state department to meet with Khomeini in Paris was opposed by Brzezinski. Partly because of this the option never received a full airing at the SCC meetings. Also, Brzezinski undoubtedly urged Carter to reject this idea, and that weakened it further. The United States in effect preferred the National Front to Khomeini, and failed to read the situation correctly. No one in the upper levels of government pushed the president forcefully to drop the shah; but men such as Henry Precht as well as numerous academics were openly opposed to him. Vance and his camp clung to the shah, thinking that reforms could still be useful; Brzezinski held on to him believing in the Iron Fist option. No coherent policy emerged.<sup>111</sup> With so many voices in such total disagreement, it is no wonder that no clear picture emerged.

Could the military have even carried out the Iron Fist option? About half of its numbers were volunteers, not conscripts, and it was fiercely loyal to the shah. In fact, the shah took such an active, personal, role in things military that it could not function without him. But by the end of 1978, or earlier, the shah himself was not functioning effectively. The army was well equipped, but trained to fight foreign wars. A number of observers believe that the army could have put down the revolt up to about October 1978 without much bloodshed, and up to December with considerable bloodshed.<sup>112</sup>

Precht's option was predicated on the notion that Khomeini was a moderate and would become a figurehead. Sick states that Khomeini's assistants, especially Ibrahim

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<sup>111</sup> See Richard Falk, "Trusting Khomeini," *New York Times*, February 16, 1979. Later he said that the Khomeini regime was "the most terroristic since Hitler," quoted in Sick, 195; see also James Bill "Iran and the Crisis of '78," *Foreign Affairs* 60 (winter 1978-79): 336 who claimed that the religious leaders "would never participate in the formal government structure;" see also Ramazani, *The United States and Iran*, 140.

<sup>112</sup> Ledeen and Lewis, *Debacle*, 153.

Yazdi, deliberately misled the United States on his intentions. Nonetheless, this option might have worked earlier in the crisis. But Brzezinski refused to give it a fair hearing. The huge amount of anti-Americanism after the fall of the shah makes one question whether dialogue was indeed a possibility. Others argue that the United States could still build a healthy relationship with Iran, even as Khomeini's dream of an Islamic republic was becoming a reality. Such a republic need not be necessarily anti-American, "let alone a fanatical theocracy." Carter was advised to study the Shi'ite doctrine generally, which was different from the "harsher" Sunni variety currently prevailing in Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Pakistan. "The Entourage around Khomeini, in fact, has had considerable involvement in human rights."<sup>113</sup>

The administration was extraordinarily hampered by the intelligence coming out of Iran as well as the confusion in the academic literature. This made it impossible to accurately assess the seriousness of the situation and the strength of the Shiite opposition. The Shiite forces were consistently underestimated throughout the crisis. Lastly, no one knew the shah had terminal cancer.

Towards the end, events outran the United States' ability to influence them. Although many in Iran saw the United States support for the shah's departure as a good sign, sending General Huyser to Iran wiped out any benefit. Was this the new "Washington's Man?" Also, Vance and Brzezinski both had flaws. Vance would not consider the Iron Fist, no matter what the arguments were in favor of it. Brzezinski, for his part, refused to believe that the revolution was not reversible, and this reversal could be accomplished by the Iron Fist. He advocated this until the end, in spite of Carter's refusal to endorse it. He was co-opted by it and failed to give Carter other choices.

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<sup>113</sup> Falk, "Khomeini's Promise," 31-32.

Stalemate resulted. Brzezinski's role in trying to implement policy further muddied the waters for the shah, who complained that he "could never get the same story from the White House and the State Department; the one kept assuring him that the United States was solidly behind him, while the other kept reminding him that force was not acceptable."<sup>114</sup> Ledeen and Lewis are highly critical of Carter, especially his insistence on human rights. They favored the iron fist option and allege that neither Carter nor the shah had the clarity of purpose to unleash the military.

The lack of policy in some ways reflected the contradictions that were present from 1953 onward, as well as the conflict between power and principle. The shah was "Washington's man" in order to protect Iran from the communists; he offered stability. Nevertheless, he was repressive, something the United States claims to be against; yet SAVAK itself was at least partially trained by the US. There was agitation in Iran that re-emerged in the 1960s; and although it was buried beneath the surface, it was there throughout the 1970s. The shah was living on borrowed time, never achieving the legitimacy he needed in the eyes of the Iranian people. Change, however, might bring revolution and instability.<sup>115</sup> In the end, no one was able to stop the fall of the shah.

An earlier realization that the shah was in deep trouble might have allowed for effective contingency plans to be developed; or, maybe not. The same division in thinking within the administration almost certainly would have been there. There were two bad options: abandon the shah or repress the revolution so he can hold on. Holding on would simply delay the day of reckoning. What then? In any case, it is difficult, if not

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<sup>114</sup> Ledeen and Lewis, *Debate*, 143; see also William H. Sullivan, "The Road Not Taken," *Foreign Policy* 40 (Fall 1980): 175-186.

<sup>115</sup> See Bruce V. Jentleson, "Discrepant Responses to Falling Dictators: Presidential Belief Systems and the Mediating Effects of the Senior Advisory Process," *Political Psychology* 11 (June 1990): 353-384; William H. Sullivan, "Dateline Iran: The Road Not Taken."

impossible, to answer “what if” questions. If keeping the shah was a bedrock principle, honest and forthright planning for contingencies may not have occurred. Loyalty to one’s friends is good on principle, but the constant carping on this by former government officials, such as Kissinger, was counterproductive. So, the United States failed to choose between two bad options.<sup>116</sup> The events in Iran have parallels to those in China in 1948-49. The news had been bad all of 1949, with the Nationalist regime of Chiang Kai-shek crumbling rapidly. The American military adviser to Chiang, General David Barr, reported that only active help from United States troops could save Chiang, and that the Nationalist “debacles...can all be attributed to the world’s worst leadership...the widespread corruption and dishonesty through the [Nationalist] armed forces....” By the spring of 1949 the complete fall of China to Mao Tse-tung (Zedong) had become a foregone conclusion. The alarm was sounded, and angry, vindictive voices of the so called “China Lobby” accused Truman of losing China, just as Carter would be accused of losing Iran thirty years later. Truman’s effort to calm the nation by trying to clarify what was about to happen before it happened backfired. In August he released a huge report from the State Department, *United States Relations with China: With Special Reference to the Period 1944-1949*, which was an overview of United States policy from the 1840s forward. Dean Acheson, secretary of state, had written in the preface that the United States had poured more than \$2 billion into support for Chiang since V-J Day. It was not enough, nor could there *ever* be enough because of the internal decay of the Nationalists. The United States was powerless to influence the outcome.<sup>117</sup> So it was with Iran in 1978-79. Also, the press was no kinder to Carter than it had been to Truman.

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<sup>116</sup> See Thomas L. Hughes, “The Crack-Up: The Price of Collective Irresponsibility,” 33-60.

<sup>117</sup> David McCullough, *Truman* 742-743.



*Time* was one of both Truman's and Carter's harshest critics.<sup>118</sup> *The New York Times* also was critical, as were the conservatives or neoconservatives of the day.<sup>119</sup> The United States was compromised in its relations with China because of the hype of the Red Scare, and for twenty-three years had little contact. Carter did not compromise the United States relations with Iran for his successor; his inability to choose between the shah and a bloodbath, or abandonment, left Reagan with the ability to start anew. The United States should unload the shah, allow a decent interval to pass, then open up again to Iran. Unfortunately, Reagan's idea of a relationship with Iran was guided by an ideology of unilateralism linked to American ideals and military power, along with an unhealthy skepticism on accommodation with other countries unless it clearly and immediately achieves America's goals.<sup>120</sup> It embroiled the United States in a sordid arms for hostages swap, a deal that would never work over the long term, with the profits diverted illegally to the Contras in Nicaragua; shot down a passenger airplane killing 290 people, and refused to see any positive aspects to building a better relationship with the country. In the meantime, it was the end of an era in Iran. The most important of the absolute monarchs in the Middle East collapsed for good.<sup>121</sup> For the United States, the worst was yet to come.

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<sup>118</sup> See as an example "The Flood Tides of History," *Time Magazine*, Monday, February 19, 1979, available at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,912351,00.html>, accessed 27 December 2007, or "The Khomeini Era Begins," *Time Magazine* Monday, February 12, 1979, available at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,920102,00.html>, accessed 27 December 2007.

<sup>119</sup> See *New York Times*, "Republicans Assail Policies of Carter," January 20, 1980, available at <http://select.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?res=F10912F63F59107788DDA90A94D9405B8084F1D3>, accessed 27 December 2007.

<sup>120</sup> See "The Vulcans," an interview with James Mann, Conversations with History series, Institute of International Studies, UC, Berkeley, February 14, 2005, available at [www.globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people5/JMann/jmann-con3.html](http://www.globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people5/JMann/jmann-con3.html), accessed 28 December 2007; Shireen T. Hunter, "Between Iraq and a Hard Place," *Foreign Policy* 66 (spring 1987): 77-97.

<sup>121</sup> Bill and Leiden, *Politics in the Middle East*, 207.

## CHAPTER VIII

## IRAN: THE BITTER HOSTAGE CRISIS

## INTRODUCTION

The events in Iran in late 1978 and early 1979 were traumatic for all concerned. Little did the Carter administration know that the worst was yet to come. The American press was curiously disinterested in Iran for most of 1978 but this changed as 1979 wore on and the Iranian people became more anti American, whipped up by the radical Ayatollah Khomeini. On November 4, 1979, 400 student militants seized the United States embassy in Tehran, taking sixty-six American diplomats hostage, and causing a crisis that staggered the Carter presidency. This chapter tells the story of the hostage crisis, and argues that Carter's policies saved the lives of the men and women involved, punished Iran by controlling much of its assets, alarmed it by its rhetoric regarding the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and stood aside as Iraq waged war on the regime.

The idea that military hardware ensures a regime's viability is an old one, albeit a faulty one. Carter inherited a string of policies that left the United States strategically dependent on Iran and its ruler, with few other options. When the central power in Iran began to unravel, no foreign government with extensive interests in Iran, not even the Iranians themselves, could keep up with it, nor did they comprehend how the revolution would turn Iran into one of the most savage states on the issue of human rights. Also, no one thought it was possible to revert to a medieval model, but revert it did. As in most revolutions, they occur not when things are at their worst; they happen, rather, when rising expectations outstrip the pace of change, especially when there is weakness at the

top. The time for swift and strong action to quell an uprising must be judged with care, as any student of the French Revolution knows. The shah, like Louis XVI before him, vacillated until it was too late.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S POLICIES

The shah left Iran on January 16, 1979 and went first to Egypt, then to Morocco, leaving behind a shaky government under Shahpur Bakhtiar's leadership, confused and uncertain military commanders, and a population that was becoming increasingly anti-American, aroused by Khomeini's tape recorded speeches that had been covertly brought into the country. Carter was satisfied with the shah's decision not to come to the US, but Brzezinski was disturbed, thinking that his presence here would demonstrate to the world that the United States was not abandoning its old ally. The United States approached Khomeini through his aide, Ibrahim Yazdi, on January 23. Zimmerman, the American envoy, told Yazdi that the United States was urging the military and the government to reach an agreement with Khomeini's representatives, and Khomeini's return to Iran prior to an agreement would spell disaster for the country. Khomeini responded that if Bakhtiar or the army tried to stop him it would hurt American interests. On the other hand, if they did not interfere, he would quiet things down. He went on to say that the provisional government he intended to name would allay United States fears. He also stressed that Iran's future would be decided by Iranians. Americans in Iran who had contact with Khomeini's National Front supporters indicated that Khomeini had hinted that he would set up a moderate, secular government, with the Islamic clergy remaining

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<sup>1</sup> Ramazani, *the United States and Iran*, 127, 133; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 173; William J. Daugherty, *In the Shadow of the Ayatollah*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001), Chapter 7; see also, for example, Crane Brinton, *Anatomy of a Revolution*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1965); Ledeen and Lewis, *Debate*, 196; Zonis, *Majestic Failure*, 267.

in the background. At that time the National Front believed that it would play a major role in the new government. They stressed that the United States should disassociate itself from Bakhtiar because he was going to disappear very quickly. Only later did it become clear that Khomeini had no intention of being a “moderate.”

The United States efforts to arrange a face to face meeting between Bakhtiar and Khomeini were impeded by Brzezinski’s opposition (according to Vance), despite the fact that Bakhtiar and the military wanted this. Brzezinski also impeded this by his insistence to Carter that the United States advise the Iranian military to seize power. Vance thought the United States was lying to itself that Bakhtiar could survive.<sup>2</sup> Bakhtiar considered arresting Khomeini if he returned to Iran, but in an effort to avoid bloodshed, changed his mind. He decided to fly to Paris instead. Khomeini’s aides agreed to this, and then Bakhtiar approved of the Ayatollah’s return to Iran, hoping against hope that this would quell the disorders. Typically, Khomeini reversed himself and refused to see Bakhtiar. He then flew to Iran on February 1, welcomed by thousands of supporters.<sup>3</sup>

General Robert “Dutch” Huyser was recalled to the United States, both on Carter’s authority and Sullivan’s recommendation, and by his own request. His mission had been to rally the Iranian army against the Ayatollah, but by the time he arrived in Iran, it was too late. Brzezinski was the only advisor to object to his recall. On February 5, Huyser reported to the president, and as a result of the meeting Carter gave a strong statement of support for Bakhtiar. He was quite disturbed by Huyser’s report of what

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<sup>2</sup> Ramazani, *The United States and Iran*, 131-133; quoted in Ledeen and Lewis, *Debacle*, 213-214; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 340-341; Brzezinski *Power and Principle*, 389. There were numerous other disagreements between Vance and Brzezinski, such as Bakhtiar’s proposal to arrest Khomeini, Huyser’s recall to the US, and others. See also, William Shawcross, *The Shah’s Last Ride* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988.) Also see David, Carrol, and Selden, *Foreign Policy Failure in the White House*, 82.

<sup>3</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 455-456; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 339-340. See also Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, (New York: Viking, 1963), 36.

Sullivan had been doing. There were also several news stories that indicated the State Department was not carrying out the president's orders. Carter was furious, and met with middle echelon officials of State and castigated them for excessive leaks and disloyalty. The State Department blamed Brzezinski for this, but he says the meeting was suggested by Hamilton Jordan, a close advisor to the president who became involved in foreign policy in January 1978.

By February 9, the Iranian military was in crisis with various units defecting to Khomeini. On February 11, Bakhtiar resigned and went into hiding, and Mehdi Bazargan, a moderate, took over the reins of government, having been chosen by Khomeini on February 5. Bakhtiar's flight signaled the end of the liberal, moderate, Westernized professionals. Many still believed that a noncommunist Islamic republic, supported by the clear majority of the Iranian people, would probably be a stabilizing element, both in the region and the Third World in general.<sup>4</sup> It did not seem so at the time in Iran, however.

Sullivan can be thanked for his cool head when the United States embassy was attacked on February 14, referred to as the St. Valentine's Day Open House, and the Fedayeen mob seized the ambassador and his staff. Sullivan ordered the Marine guard not to resist, thwarting the Fedayeen's hope for a bloodbath. Fortunately, the government forces arrived in time and no lives were lost. Coincidentally, the United States ambassador to Afghanistan was kidnapped by rebel forces, but his fate was death. The Iranians also attacked a United States military observation post in northeast Iran, then they captured twenty Air Force employees at an intelligence monitoring station, releasing

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<sup>4</sup> Falk, "Khomeini's Promise, 33.

them after several frightening days<sup>5</sup> Clearly, American security in the country was becoming more fragile. Sullivan cabled that there was no longer a military establishment integrated and responsive to United States influence; and those who had guns were anti-American, because the United States had encouraged resistance rather than collaboration. A signal to this effect was the telephone call Carter made to the shah after Black Friday when the Iranian military had fired into unarmed crowds at Jalah Square, killing and wounding hundreds of men, women, and children on September 8. On September 10, Carter telephoned the shah from Camp David during his Middle East talks to tell him that he had the support and friendship of the US. As demonstrated in the preceding chapter, no coherent policy emerged on what to do about the revolution, and Carter decided to work with the new Iranian government rather than turn away from it. Supporting Bakhtiar as long as he did was probably a mistake, because the Bakhtiar government was tied so tightly to the shah, whom the United States government had also supported for far too long. Sullivan further said that for those concerned with the safety of American diplomats, the chancery in Tehran was in shambles and “dependent on a group trained to assassinate us.” He was referring to the Mujahidin, the group that had attacked the embassy on February 14, and who continued to roam the compound, looting the commissary and offices. Sullivan was understandably annoyed because of a telephone call from David Newsom, undersecretary of state for political affairs, on behalf of Brzezinski, asking if “Option C”, a military coup, was viable. It came at the very moment that General Philip Gast (chief, Military Assistance Advisory Group, Tehran

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<sup>5</sup> Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., and Jacquelyn K. Davis, eds., *National Security Decisions*, (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1990), 297; Daugherty, *In the Shadow of the Ayatollah*, 10; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 340, 342-343; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 460; Don Hopkins, “The October Surprise: The Iranian Hostage Rescue Mission, and the 1980 Presidential Election,” available at [www.donhopkins.com](http://www.donhopkins.com), accessed 1 January 2008.

1977-79) was in a bunker dodging fire between the cadets and the Imperial Guard. The call overrode a reply to Sullivan's request for help from the Iranian government.<sup>6</sup>

The United States announced that it would maintain normal diplomatic relations with the new regime on February 16, as bands of young men roamed the streets meting out "revolutionary justice," with anti-Americanism rising and civil war threatening. A power struggle was obviously going on. Sullivan met with Bazargan and assured him (and through him Khomeini) that the United States accepted the revolution and that the United States would not interfere with internal Iranian affairs. Sullivan also told him that the United States was prepared to continue an arms supply relationship. He also protested the human rights violations that were occurring.<sup>7</sup> This was an effort to strengthen this moderate government, but clearly it was in deep difficulty. There were, however, some encouraging signs as well. For example, Khomeini sent his personal representative to meet with Vance to pledge more cooperation and friendship, and to make certain that the United States was supporting the new government. The early contacts, however, soon dried up; and so, by default, the United States continued to emphasize the moderates. The State Department, which had foreseen the shah's collapse before the NSC, depended on reputable scholars in the US, who also thought that the moderates would probably carry the day. This time, they were wrong, and when the American overtures towards the moderates were returned in kind, many Iranians became sullen.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>William H. Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, 255-263; Pfaltzgraff and Davis, *National Security Decisions*, 297; Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 258.

<sup>7</sup>Vance, *Hard Choices*, 341-343; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 389-393. Brzezinski gives a more detailed account of the discussions in the United States during the last hours of the Bakhtiar's regime. To the end, he regretted that there was no military coup; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 458-459.

<sup>8</sup>Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 279-280. Bill was one of those scholars, as was Richard Cottam, previously cited in this work.

In Iran, the original objective was not to overthrow the shah and replace him with an Islamic government, or so everyone thought. Even Khomeini's closest supporters who risked their lives to organize the demonstrations had little desire for rule by the clerics. The opposition wanted fundamentally to return to the constitution of 1906. It was Khomeini who insisted on *revolutionary* change – the total dissolution of the system and the creation of a new order based on the will of the masses, as shown by their presence on the streets. Khomeini (not unlike Hitler in the 1920s) harnessed the disparate forces of the shah's opposition and shaped them into a body with form and purpose, infused with his own ideology; an ideology that baffled and mystified not only Westerners, but also Iranians themselves – the ideology of a man who craved power at any cost. The Iran they created was unlike any in its history, and it disillusioned many. One reason that no one could see it coming was that in the Western experience revolutions have led to the secularization of society; that is, church and state became separate; but in Iran the opposite occurred.<sup>9</sup>

In Washington, the Carter administration had to try to fashion a new Iranian policy in a world inhabited by powerful Pahlavi supporters. They were shrill in their blame of Carter, and were preoccupied with ideas of counterrevolution. Many tied the new regime to communists and the KGB as well as the PLO.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, the United States had begun bringing Americans home because of the increasing anti-Americanism. By the time Khomeini returned, about 25,000 had been evacuated, but 10,000 still remained. Vance ordered Sullivan to send all military and

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<sup>9</sup> Ramazani, *The United States and Iran*, 125; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 157-158, 164; Ledeen and Lewis, *Debacle*, 193; Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 276-277.

<sup>10</sup> James Bill refers to some academic critics as “uninformed secular ideologues,” and cites specifically Michael Ledeen and William Lewis, *Debacle: American Failure in Iran* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 117.



civilian personnel home who were not absolutely essential to the American mission. All dependents were to leave as well. He was also to advise the American business community still present to accelerate its departure. David Newsom coordinated the process at the Washington end, and by March 45,000 had been evacuated with no loss of life.<sup>11</sup>

### *An Invitation Retracted*

On March 1, Vance recommended to Carter that the United States retract its invitation to the shah to come to the United States. If he had come immediately after he left Iran on January 16, there might have been little adverse reaction there, provided he kept a low profile. But his procrastination presented the United States with a serious problem where none should have existed. By now Khomeini was demanding the shah's return in order to face revolutionary justice. Also, after the St. Valentine's Day attack on the embassy, many were reconsidering the wisdom of his coming. This, and in light of the United States interests in forging a relationship with the new government, as well as the safety of Americans still in Iran, dictated that the shah not be allowed to enter the country. The shah was informed of this on March 17. He took the news calmly, merely asking for help in finding a safe haven. The United States contacted numerous countries and eventually found a temporary place for him in the Bahamas, then in Mexico. Carter was under considerable pressure from the shah's friends in the United States to allow him entry. These included John McCloy, David Rockefeller, and Henry Kissinger. They had an ally in Brzezinski, but were unable to convince either Vance or Carter.<sup>12</sup> Brzezinski never wavered in support of the shah coming to the US. For him, it was a matter of

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<sup>11</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 460; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 470.

<sup>12</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith* 460; Daughtery *In the Shadow of the Ayatollah*, 94-95; Vance *Hard Choices*, 370; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 473-474; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 177-179.

principle as well as tactics. At stake was the United States historical commitment to asylum, plus loyalty to an old friend. To compromise those principles would taint the image of the United States in the eyes of the world and lower its own self esteem – for little benefit. He believed that the principles involved were central to the United States system, and this should be presented to the world in strong terms. He relates that Mondale also thought along these lines.<sup>13</sup>

By mid-April the Charge d'Affairs in Iran, Charles Naas,<sup>14</sup> (Sullivan had left on April 6) reported that Khomeini was stepping up his attacks on the US, and that most of the irregular security forces had been withdrawn from the embassy. Several thousand Americans remained in Iran, and allowing the shah into the United States at this time would have endangered everyone. Later, when the revolution subsided, it might be possible. The United States did allow the shah's children to attend school in the US, after clearing it with Bazargan. The shah's wife could come for medical treatment, but not to live with their children. Humanitarian concerns dictated that the United States do what it could for the family, but allowing the empress into the country came dangerously close to confirming to the Iranians that the United States still supported the shah. Henry Kissinger, busy as usual, hinted to Brzezinski that he was willing to support the administration on the SALT negotiations, if it gave the shah asylum. Carter resented this, and at a foreign policy breakfast he said he did not want the shah here playing tennis while Americans in Tehran were being kidnapped. He had a pretty good instinct for what could happen. In May, another problem cropped up. The Khomeini regime was treating former officials of Iran and religious and ethnic minorities, in brutal ways. The United

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<sup>13</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 472.

<sup>14</sup> The turnover was fast; and Bruce Laingen soon replaced him.

States officially protested, and Congress passed a resolution condemning Khomeini's actions. His reaction was to increase attacks on the American. Journalists, members of congress, national and international business leaders were reminded by Kissinger daily that Carter would not let the shah come to America.<sup>15</sup> Obviously, the shah's life and comfort was more important to Kissinger than the safety of the diplomats in Iran. The Senate resolution caused nation wide anti-American riots in Iran and convinced the Iranians of American hostility towards the revolution; some even claiming it was a major event leading to the takeover of the embassy in Tehran and the hostage crisis.<sup>16</sup>

*Spring and Summer: After This the Deluge*

Carter relates that over the spring and summer the situation improved, at least in some ways. The United States had limited aims: maintain access to Iranian oil and gradually develop better relations. Yazdi, now foreign minister, made a major speech outlining several Iranian policies. These included complete commitment to the Palestinian cause, improved relations with the US, and a noncommittal attitude toward the Soviet Union. In August the United States agreed to resume the transfer of a limited supply of spare parts for their military, and exchanged a limited amount of intelligence with the Bazargan government. Relations became more businesslike.

After a series of disagreements between Khomeini and Bazargan, they evidently decided to go their own way and avoid each other. Bazargan, Yazdi, and a few others were allowed to run the government, but the Ayatollah had the final authority, a man who was irrational and irresponsible and who kept Iran in constant upheaval. The revolution was far from over; the bloodbath was continuous, causing some of Khomeini's allies to

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<sup>15</sup> Daughtery, *In the Shadow of the Ayatollah*, 95-96. Vance, *Hard Choices*, 344-345; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 460-461; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 474; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 178-179.

<sup>16</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 285.

leave him and others to be murdered. As his problems mounted, he lashed out more and more against the United States, telling his followers in the street that it was the source of their problems, even as the government officials tried to restore normal relations. There were two broad categories of people who wanted power: those who wanted to build a secular, modern Iran, and the clerics who wanted to get rid of Western corruption and establish an Islamic state. There were many fissures within these two wings. Finally, the mobs began to turn against Khomeini, rebellion broke out, and some provinces demanded autonomy. Khomeini was no weak minded shah; he was determined to save his revolution by any means necessary. He cracked down on the press, outlawed playing music on Iranian radio and television programs, stating that it was the equivalent of opium and was corrupting the youth. Bazargan began to doubt that he could deal with the economic and social breakdown of the nation under Khomeini's leadership, and asked to be relieved of his duties; instead, he reshuffled his cabinet and stayed.

A serious mistake was placing too much confidence in the Iranian government and its ability to actually govern. Throughout the summer of 1979 small, incremental steps were taken to help stabilize the relationship under the direction of Henry Precht of the State Department, who had enormous confidence in the moderates' ability to get power once the shah was gone. He wrote an assessment of the situation three weeks after the Bakhtiar government collapsed and devoted most of the discussion to the "elements of strength" that he perceived. It was sent out without any coordination outside the State Department and was purported to be official United States policy. It received a scathing reply from Sullivan, saying these elements did not exist. Things were getting worse, not better. This did not deter Precht. He had influence because he had the ear of Assistant

Secretary Harold Saunders. It was this philosophy that shaped the small but very important decisions about manning and operating the embassy. Brzezinski was convinced that Bazargan was succeeding as well, and disliked the thought of doing anything that might suggest a lessening of United States support.<sup>17</sup>

The high level contacts that the United States had made over the summer reassured those involved that the Bazargan government would survive, and this might have led to unrealistic expectations. The question of “who lost Iran?” began to be asked, and the issue was heating up as a major policy debate in the upcoming presidential election.<sup>18</sup> Accounts differed on the health and strength of the regime. It was obviously still revolutionary, and the pendulum swung back and forth throughout the spring and summer as to whether it would turn out to be moderate or fanatical. The administration tried hard to convince the Iranians that it recognized Khomeini, that it understood the revolution, and that the United States and Iran still had common economic and security interests.<sup>19</sup> However, it had no direct contact with Khomeini. There was a promising start to a potential meeting, but the Congressional outcry against the human rights abuses thwarted this. Some argue that the United States was deliberately isolating itself from the revolution so as not to antagonize the moderates, and the Iranians claim that the United States never recognized the revolution.<sup>20</sup>

*The Rapid Deployment Force: The Germ of the Idea*

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<sup>17</sup> Ledeen and Lewis, *Debate*, 189; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 188.

<sup>18</sup> Daughtery, *In the Shadow of the Ayatollah*, 95; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 180, 190.

<sup>19</sup> See “Country Plan Proposal,” Confidential, Cable ICA, July 10, 1979 in Iran Revolution Collection, Item Number IR02742 in Digital National Security Archive, available at [www.nsarchive.chadwyck.com](http://www.nsarchive.chadwyck.com), accessed 20 January 2008; “Summary of Henry Precht’s Conversation with Andrew Sens and Victor Tomseth,” Confidential, Letter, July 20, 1979 in Iran Revolution Collection, Item Number IR02769, available at [www.nsarchive.chadwyck.com](http://www.nsarchive.chadwyck.com), accessed 20 January 2008; also see Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions*, Chapter 9, “Charismatic Disorder 1979,” 252-299; Cottam, *Iran and the United States*, 208-210.

<sup>20</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 281.

There were numerous Special Coordinating Committee meetings throughout this time as the United States began to try to find ways to bolster security in the region.

Harold Brown, defense secretary, Brzezinski, and Vance agreed that the United States should bolster its defense ties and military capabilities in the Gulf. Brzezinski had the most sweeping, far reaching ideas. One of these ideas proposed to the president was that the United States should develop the ability to rapidly deploy ground, air, and naval forces into the area; to conduct joint military exercises and security consultations with friends and allies; and permanently deploy the navy in the Indian Ocean.

While the RDF was a good idea, ideas alone do not produce results. Shortly after the signing of SALT II in Vienna in June 1979 Brzezinski asked the Defense Department what progress had been made. The Pentagon essentially replied, "Not much." When Brzezinski expressed impatience, General David Jones, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) initiated planning at the "joint" level among the services, and modest planning began, but no major shift of resources was made.<sup>21</sup> The military continued to plan almost exclusively for an East-West confrontation. However, the United States began to get access to local friendly ports and airfields during a crisis, and expanded air and naval facilities on British Diego Garcia as well as pre-position combat equipment for ground support of United States troops. All of this preceded the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan. The invasion and the hostage crisis accelerated the actions already under way. Vance was quite clear on this.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> William E. Odom, "The Cold War Origins of the United States Central Command," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8 (spring 2006): 64.

<sup>22</sup> William E. Odom, "The Cold War Origins of the U.S. Central Command," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8 (spring 2006):52; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 370; Kupchan, "American Globalism in the Middle East," 600; Joe Stork, "The Carter Doctrine and U. S. Bases in the Middle East," *MERIP Reports* 90 (September, 1980): 3-14+32.

There is some criticism of these activities. Some scholars see parallels between the military show of force in 1957-58 in the Middle East in response to a real or imagined Soviet threat and the events of 1979-80. Also, the move towards securing bases in the region when the Iranian revolution was spewing a contagious anti-Americanism might have been counterproductive, according to some. However, contrary to popular belief, the United States was reacting in 1979 to regional events, not to a perceived Soviet threat. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan probably gave the United States some leverage over Iran; it was still fearful of the Russians. The United States actions were a response to the Iranian revolution. The same *might* be said for Eisenhower in 1957-1958. His actions were in response to Nasserism, not to the Soviets.<sup>23</sup> Both presidents wanted to gain or keep the friendship of countries in the region. However, as the United States sought to gain the cooperation that would give it the capacity to support its friends in the region, those friends became less certain about the benefits to them.<sup>24</sup>

### *The Shah and his Illness*

The shah and his illness interjected itself back into the situation in October 1979 when Carter heard about his cancer. Vance noted that David Rockefeller, who had informed David Newsom about the matter, had sent his own doctor to Mexico, and the shah was seriously ill. He might ask the administration to admit him to the United States for treatment. The United States was also worried that the shah's time in Mexico was running out. Vance met Yazdi at the UN on October 3, and Yazdi asked if the United States was going to admit the shah. Vance did not rule it out, but said not at the time. On

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<sup>23</sup> Kupchan, "American Globalism in the Middle East," 594.

<sup>24</sup> David Newsom cited in United States Congress, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *United States Security Interests and Policies in Southwest Asia*, 1980, 85; Newsom, "America Engulfed," *Foreign Policy* 43 (summer, 1981):27. He relates that the doctrine was a statement of intent, supporting the creation of a security framework yet to be formed.

October 18 Rockefeller's staff told the State Department that the shah's condition was getting worse and that it could not be properly diagnosed and treated in Mexico. Several days later the story came out: he had suffered for several years from malignant lymphoma which was no longer responding to chemotherapy. Rockefeller wanted to bring him to Sloan-Kettering Hospital in New York for treatment. The State Department's medical director who had also gone to Mexico concurred in the diagnosis.<sup>25</sup>

The Carter administration was faced with a terrible decision – as usual, it was presented as a choice between power and principle. Should the United States allow the shah into the country for medical treatment, which a basic sense of humanity demanded, when this could put Americans in Tehran in danger? Vance now favored allowing the shah in, but Carter remained the lone holdout, asking what United States policy should be if Americans in Tehran were kidnapped. He and his senior advisers were unanimous that the United States should try to help the shah if Iran could and would protect the embassy. Henry Precht was in Tehran at the time and he and Laingen were instructed to inform Bazargan and Yazdi of the situation and seek their assistance. They did this, and while warned that there would be a sharp reaction in Iran, they guaranteed the protection. Warren Christopher, on Vance's orders, suggested to Carter that he should

- Notify Bazargan of the shah's condition and the humanitarian need for treatment in the United States;
- Unless the Iranian government's reaction was very negative, inform the shah that the United States is willing to have him come to New York for treatment arranged by David Rockefeller, but ask that his household in Mexico be kept intact;

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<sup>25</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 370-371.



- Prepare a press release that the shah was being admitted to the United States for evaluation and diagnostics on humanitarian grounds, but that no commitment has been made as to how long he can remain.

The recommendations were intended to minimize, as much as possible, the danger to the diplomats in Iran. Carter decided on a middle path; to allow the shah to go to New York for diagnostics and evaluation, but there would be no asylum. He told Vance to inform Iran, but not to ask permission. The Iranian government's reaction was moderate, but they made it clear that it was unwelcome news. They preferred that he be treated outside of the country, and if that were not possible somewhere other than New York. The United States said that neither he nor his wife would engage in political activity.<sup>26</sup>

Based on Laingen and Precht's report of their discussions Carter gave the order on October 21 to admit the shah. He came on October 22. The option of another location was considered and then rejected because it would delay treatment, which appeared to be urgent. Perhaps he could have been treated in Mexico, but the equipment was not all in one place and the doctors believed that he was on the verge of death. There was speculation in the press that Carter made the decision on the basis of political expediency. However, it seems clear that this was a humanitarian decision. David Newsom recounts that he and "Gary Sick concluded in September that the president of the United States could not be responsible for refusing to admit someone if there was a dire and demonstrable medical need." Carter agreed only reluctantly and had said bluntly that he was not willing to jeopardize Americans in Tehran so that the shah could play tennis or

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<sup>26</sup> Pfaltzgraff, and Davis, eds., *National Security Decisions*, 298; Daughtery, *In the Shadow of the Ayatollah*, 94-97; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 372; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 475; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 464-465; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 184; III..Political/Intelligence Issues J. Huyser Mission and Shah's Entry into the US, Secret, Report State, January 29, 1980, Collection: Iran Revolution, Item Number IR035566 available at [www.nsarchives.chadwyck.com](http://www.nsarchives.chadwyck.com), accessed 2 December 2007.

his wife could go shopping. So, Carter and his advisors were not unaware of the risks involved. Perhaps they placed too much confidence in the moderates in the Iranian government. However, had the administration refused the medical treatment it would be seen as a rejection of the humanitarian traditions of the American nation.<sup>27</sup>

Carter understood that hospitality is biblical; it comes under Mosaic Law. Proverbs say that even enemies must be given the necessities of survival. In Christianity Jesus had to depend on the hospitality of strangers during his ministry, and used the opportunity of a meal to teach. He also used the language of hospitality to describe God and His kingdom. The theme of the precarious, yet necessary, relationship between guest and host was well known in the ancient world, and it is not surprising that Carter's Judeo-Christian principles demanded that the shah be given medical treatment. The Koran also demands hospitality, but the Iranians did not see things this way.

The initial arrival of the shah caused no radical reaction, either from the Iranian government or the people. But lingering suspicions of the United States association with the shah and the recollection of the events of 1953 proved too strong to overcome. Carter writes that the United States monitored the situation carefully and received a series of reports through the State Department which stated that the Tehran press was restrained and that there had been no editorial comment. In response to a United States request, the security forces guarding the embassy had been strengthened. Several large scale demonstrations were held, but were peaceful.

On November 1, Brzezinski found himself at a celebration dinner in Algiers with Bazargan, Yazdi, and Mustapha Ali Chamran, the Iranian defense minister. When

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<sup>27</sup> Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions*, 297; Newsom as quoted in Pfaltzgraff and Davis, 209; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 185-186.

Laingen had learned of the dinner a few days earlier, he had urged Brzezinski to meet with the Iranians, believing that the more contact the better. He also mentioned the possibility to Bazargan. A private meeting subsequently took place in which Yazdi emphasized that the shah's presence in the United States disturbed them and made the people believe that the United States was involved with his political supporters.

Brzezinski, angry, said the discussion was humiliating and pointed out that it was Iranian tradition to welcome refugees and grant asylum. "The man is sick, and we will not act contrary to our principles." Bazargan then suggested that Iranian doctors be allowed to examine him so that they could be assured that he really was sick. On the subject of frozen Iranian assets in the US, Brzezinski said that the United States court doors were open and Iran could sue for them any time they wanted. Brzezinski, for his part, talked in general terms of the strategic interests that Iran and the United States had in common and talked of the possibilities for cooperation, aid, and military support. Brzezinski came away from the meeting convinced that the men were intelligent and sensible; they had a seriousness of purpose as well as a realistic assessment of the problems they faced. But the situation changed radically. The secret meeting, coupled with the admittance of the shah to the US, made the students misapply the analogy of the situation to the 1953 coup. They were convinced this would be repeated, and Brzezinski, hardly a marginal player did advocate a coup.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> There is disagreement over United States policies, with some scholars insisting that the diplomats should have received "full security," but what this would mean was not spelled out. Sending in a large United States military contingent would have confirmed to the Iranians that the United States was planning a coup and enrage them even more. A small military contingent, whatever that might be, could not have held off the mobs of militants indefinitely. See Ledeen and Lewis, *Debauchery*, 223; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 189; Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions*, 297; See also David Patrick Houghton, *U. S. Foreign Policy and the Iran Hostage Crisis*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Cottam, *Iran and the United States*, 210; Bill *The Eagle and the Lion*, 294.

This meeting that swayed the harshest United States critic of the revolution became the excuse in Iran to diminish the power of Bazargan and Yazdi a few days later. On Sunday, November 4, 1979, a date that Carter will never forget, the American embassy in Tehran was overrun by about three thousand militants. About fifty or sixty of the American staff had been captured. Although seriously disturbed, the administration was confident that the Iranian government would soon rout the militants and release the captured Americans. Many nations had faced similar situations, but no host government, so far as anyone knew, had ever refused to try to protect threatened diplomats. Iran had made a firm commitment to do that, and in the past few weeks even some of Khomeini's forces had helped to disburse crowds of demonstrators. Brzezinski's meeting with Bazargan and Yazdi tainted them and they were now powerless to help.<sup>29</sup>

Bazargan tried to remove the militants, but after a few hours passed without forceful action, the United States grew more and more worried. The mob wanted Khomeini to see that the embassy had been taken over by his young, pious followers, thus making it difficult for him to allow the government to send help. The United States contacted any officials it knew in both the Bazargan Cabinet and the Revolutionary Council, where government and religious leaders made the basic decisions on policy. The militant extremists had become overnight heroes, however, and Khomeini praised them. He knew that he could use them to strengthen the revolution and gain complete power. That made the United States more valuable to him as an enemy than a friend, and after that, no government official would risk confronting him. This was when Bazargan

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<sup>29</sup> Pfaltzgraff and Davis, 300; Hamilton Jordan, *Crisis: The Last Year of the Carter Presidency* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1982), 27; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 189; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle* 475-476; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 373; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 465-466; Ledeen and Lewis, *Debate*, 229

and Yazdi resigned in disgust. It was not clear what the militants wanted. Carter believes that they had not originally intended to remain in the embassy or to hold the Americans captive more than a few hours, but when they received the adoring praise of many of their comrades, they decided to stay. The only thing they demanded was the return of the shah and his money to Iran. Later, some of the students said to the hostages that it was to weaken the secular government and breathe new life into the revolution; and they thought that it would last only a few days.<sup>30</sup> The students served Khomeini well – it was through this event that he was able to cement his power over the tone and direction of the revolution.

The administration began to review its options. It had begun to consider ways to deal with the growing chaos in Iran in late 1978, but there was little consensus on what to do. Secretary of Defense Harold Brown ordered the Pentagon to begin contingency planning to replace the guardian role played by the shah. The planning focused on a wide range of intraregional issues. In February 1979 Brown also articulated the United States commitment to defend its vital interests in the Gulf region. This later became the Carter Doctrine. Although many thought the doctrine was in response to the Soviet invasion Afghanistan, it was incorporated into United States policy more than ten months earlier as a response to the revolution in Iran. Instead of focusing on the chaos in Iran, the Pentagon focused on a US-Soviet confrontation, because the chaos in Iran might invite Soviet intervention. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan confirmed the bias. So when the militants captured the United States embassy and took the diplomats hostage, the Pentagon had nothing to offer Carter. The Iranians hated and feared the Soviet expansion southward and the absurdity of the hostage crisis was even more apparent to the

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<sup>30</sup>See Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006).

administration. The Iranian foreign minister, not a reliable source, thought the crisis could be solved in a reasonable amount of time.<sup>31</sup>

There were still 570 Americans in Iran. The companies that employed them were notified to get their people out. The United States asked the Algerians, Syrians, Turks, Pakistanis, Libyans, PLO and others to intercede. Carter recognized that it is almost impossible to deal rationally with an irrational person by Western standards, but he also believed that the world of Islam would be damaged badly if a person such as Khomeini committed murder in the name of religion against 60 innocent people. He had no intention of releasing the shah to them. When asked whether the United States would be willing to apologize to Iran for the 1953 coup; Carter snapped that “1953 is ancient history.” However, it was no such thing to the Iranians.<sup>32</sup> A working group was formed at the State Department, headed by Precht. It operated twenty-four hours a day until the crisis was over. Brzezinski convened an SCC which met several times a week throughout the crisis. In addition, he also presided over a highly secret small group, involving only Harold Brown, General Jones (Chair, Joint Chiefs of Staff), and Stansfield Turner, which focused on military options. No one knew it would take fourteen months to resolve the issue – four hundred and forty-four days.<sup>33</sup>

### *Early Mistakes That Compounded the Crisis*

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<sup>31</sup> Kupchan, “American Globalism in the Middle East,” 593; Newsom, “America Engulfed,” 20; Cottam, *Iran and the United States*, 213.

<sup>32</sup> See Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*; see also Christopher Hemmer, “Historical Analogies and the Definition of Interests: The Iranian Hostage Crisis and Ronald Reagan’s Policy toward the Hostages in Lebanon,” *Political Psychology* 20 (June 1999): 267-289.

<sup>33</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 466-467; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 373-375; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 477-479. Brzezinski says that the SCC acted as the coordinating mechanism, with himself as chair much of the time. It was very broadly constituted and could coordinate all the facets of the problem and the United States response, from the diplomatic to the military, to the financial, to public relations and domestic politics.

In the limited sense of protecting the embassy's physical security, nothing was left undone. A survey was taken after the February attack and a number of steps were taken. The entrances to the chancery building – believed to be the most probable target of an attack – were equipped with heavy steel doors, backed up by alarm and surveillance systems and remote control tear gas devices. Bulletproof glass went into the window frames. Contingency plans were developed for a staged withdrawal in case of an attack. Defenses were designed to allow the embassy to hold off an attack for two or three hours until help could arrive. The plan worked exactly as designed, *except no help came*.<sup>34</sup>

Another problem was the bureaucratic “creep” of the embassy. Between the two attacks, each office had tried to rebuild itself back to normal working levels, in spite of a bare bones policy that had been formally approved. By the time of the November attack the number of people at the embassy had grown significantly beyond what had originally been approved. The proliferation of files, a third problem complicating the crisis, is difficult to explain. Sullivan had ordered all reference files to be shipped to the United States prior to February, retaining only a small working file in each office. These were destroyed in mid- February as the situation deteriorated. But when the embassy was reconstituted after the February attack, the various agencies shipped back many boxes of files that Sullivan had sent home, a fact not known by the White House. When the crisis began to mount in October, the embassy found itself drowning in paper that needed to be protected. It failed to take advantage of the time between when the shah entered the United States and the attack to get rid of this paper. The embassy in Tehran was able to destroy some classified documents and the visa stamps in order to keep unsavory people

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<sup>34</sup> Ramazani, *The United States and Iran*, 163; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 186.

from gaining access to the US; but not all the documents.<sup>35</sup> Some that were shredded were later pieced together and published by the Iranians. When the attack came, a very large amount of classified information fell into the hands of the militants. Although he acted with courage and dignity during the crisis, the Charge had failed to take this elementary precaution. The documents, dating back to the 1950s, were subsequently published in Tehran. Every person who had any contact with the embassy was now also a hostage in the sense that he or she could be blackmailed or prosecuted on the assumption that he was working for the United States. A number were harassed and threatened. The spy hysteria had a devastating effect in the factional political wars. It seemed like proof that the United States had managed Iranian affairs for years,<sup>36</sup> with very long term consequences for the US, in spite of the fact that there was nothing sensational to be found. The sheer quantity of the material made it difficult to know what had been lost and what had been destroyed, complicating the work of the crisis team.

A final question that might be asked is why the embassy was not evacuated when the shah came to the US. It was not even discussed, either in Washington or Tehran. Several factors should be considered. First, the United States had the assurances of the Iranian government that it would protect the embassy, and had indeed done so on November 1 when an attack was expected. A second factor was the overwhelming importance of Iran to the Gulf region. Vital United States interests were at stake. A total withdrawal would signal that the United States was washing its hands of the revolution, and probably would have destroyed the tenuous links within the country that it had made.

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<sup>35</sup>Daughtery, *In the Shadow of the Ayatollah*, 108-109.

<sup>36</sup> See Daughtery, *In the Shadow of the Ayatollah*, 108 and Chapter 1; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 190-191. Sick writes that the loss of the files was more embarrassing than substantive; however, from a 2007 perspective, it had long term negative consequences for the United States because it is offered as proof that the United States meddles in Iranian affairs; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 479.



Third, the people serving in the embassy were old hands; many could speak the language and they liked the people. They believed in the work they were doing. Although many disagreed with the decision to allow the shah into the US, and were well aware of the danger to themselves, they resisted the impulse to run away. Many lived to regret this decision.<sup>37</sup>

When the attackers breached the compound the security drill for those in the chancery, the dominant building, was to go to the third floor. The chancery had been “hardened” in various ways, and the third floor was protected by a heavy-gauge steel door that blocked the entry to the floor. It was paneled to look like wood. Thus protected, they were to wait for the Iranian police or military. Phil Gast, head of the MAAG (Military Assistance Advisory Group) spoke by telephone to Bruce Laingen who happened to be in the foreign ministry at the time. Laingen urged the group to hang on while officials at the ministry tried to get the police to come. Earlier, a security guard had gone out to “reason” with the mob; and there was little doubt that he would suffer the same fate as those captured in the other two buildings. The guard now demanded that the door be opened. If those inside did not comply, he would be shot. The information was relayed to Laingen who then told the group to surrender. Bert Moore, the administrative counselor said “Let the record show that the embassy surrendered at twelve twenty.”<sup>38</sup>

### *The United States Reacts*

Early on, any military option was put on hold until the situation became less fluid. The United States was constrained by the fact that if it launched an attack the hostages would almost certainly be murdered. The idea of a rescue operation was dropped after

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<sup>37</sup> Sick, *All Fall Down*, 193.

<sup>38</sup>Quoted in Daugherty, *In the Shadow of the Ayatollah*, 110.

receiving a pessimistic assessment, to say the least, from the Joint Chiefs of Staff: zero chance of success. Contingency planning proceeded, however. The biggest problem was the inaccessibility of the embassy. It was more than six hundred miles from the nearest operating aircraft carriers in the middle of densely populated Tehran.

On November 20 another aircraft carrier was sent to the Indian Ocean. Satellite pictures were taken to determine where Iran's airplanes and other forces were located. Everyone was concerned about the remaining Americans in Iran, and was also incensed by the violent demonstrations in the United States that were put on by pro-Khomeini Iranian students. On November 11, President Carter sent a note to Brzezinski that said, "When we get Americans out of Iran, I want all Iranian 'students' who are not enrolled full-time in college to be expelled. Tell Ben [Civiletti, the Attorney General] to prepare optimum implementation of this enforcement of United States law."<sup>39</sup> Carter also ordered that no Iranian demonstrations were to be held on federal property, and was "incensed" when his legal advisers and some staff leaders came back over and over to argue that this order might infringe on free speech. Carter thought that the anger and frustration of Americans could cause any such demonstration to turn into a bloody riot, endangering the hostages in Iran. There were more arguments about it and the issue went to court, but the court upheld his decision as a proper use of presidential power. The Ayatollah mocked Carter, saying "The Americans don't simply want to free these spies, all this crisis is to help Carter get reelected....He doesn't attach any importance human

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<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 478-479; Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah*, 210; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 377.

beings....This 'humanitarian' thinks he can mobilize the whole world into starving us....<sup>40</sup>

Hopes that the crisis would be short lived began to evaporate. All recognized the growing danger to the lives of the hostages. Everyone knew that Khomeini had the real power, and on November 5 Carter's senior advisers recommended that the United States send a personal emissary to see him. Ramsey Clark, former attorney general who had contacts among the religious leaders, including Khomeini, and William Miller, an ex-Foreign Service officer who had served in Tehran and spoke Farsi, were recommended. Khomeini agreed, then in his usual fashion changed his mind and would not allow them to enter Iran. Vance speculates that this might have been the last chance to get the hostages out before they became pawns in the internal power struggle. It began to sink in that this crisis would go on for a long time.<sup>41</sup>

Carter decided that the United States would pursue two objectives: protection of the nation's honor and interests, and the safe release of the hostages. The United States would not return the shah, would offer no apology for any previous actions or policies, or permit the hostages to go on trial. The strategy would be two tracked. First, the United States would use all channels of communication to ascertain the condition of the hostages and give them the assurances that the country was pursuing their release as strongly as it could; determine the Iranians' motives in holding them; and negotiate their freedom. Second, the United States would try to build intense pressure on Iran through the UN and other international bodies, increase Iran's isolation, and make its leaders see the costs to the revolution of holding the hostages. The Security Council unanimously condemned the

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<sup>40</sup> Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah*, 253; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 468-469, 475.

<sup>41</sup> Jordan, *Crisis*, 35-37; Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah*, 122-123; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 479.

Iranian seizure of hostages and demanded their immediate return. The revolution became even more violent. In December the International Court of Justice ruled that Iran had violated international law. Virtually all governments now soundly condemned Iran. This still did not mean they were on board with any punitive sanctions, however.<sup>42</sup>

The PLO helped to persuade Khomeini to order the release of thirteen women and black hostages. They arrived in the United States on November 17 and were able to provide important information on what was happening in Tehran and the barbaric treatment of some of the hostages. The bad publicity this generated for Iran did lead to some improvement in the treatment of the captives. It was the United Nations that provided the first significant opportunity for diplomatic action. Vance met secretly with Kurt Waldheim, the secretary general, and his aide Rafeuddin Ahmed. By then the United States knew that there were divisions in Iran between moderates in the Revolutionary Council such as Foreign Minister Bani-Sadr and religious pragmatists on the one hand, and the extremists on the other. The moderates wanted to get through the crisis before it could damage the revolution. Unfortunately, the Revolutionary Council had no control over the captors. They answered to Khomeini. Vance presented four points which, although modified somewhat over the next months, remained the American position for the duration. The United States

- Demanded the release of all personnel held in Tehran;
- Suggested the establishment of an international commission to investigate allegations of human rights abuses by Iran;

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<sup>42</sup> Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah*, 253; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 376-378; Ted L. Stein, "Contempt, Crisis, and the Court: The World Court and the Hostage Rescue Attempt," *The American Journal of International Law*, 76 (September, 1982): 499-531.

- Indicated that United States courts were available to hear Iranian claims on the assets it thought had been illegally taken from the country;
- Proposed an affirmation by the governments of Iran and the United States of their intention to abide by the Declaration of Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, and by the provisions of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

The Iranian position had not changed. They wanted the shah, an apology for United States' past "crimes" against Iran, a return of the shah's assets, and an end to alleged United States interference in Iran. The United States was not prepared to do these things. No meeting between Vance and Bani-Sadr ever took place. Bani-Sadr was dismissed from his post as foreign minister and did not reappear until he became president of Iran in January 1980. Sadegh Ghotbzadeh replaced him, a person who was close to Khomeini. There was talk of putting the hostages on trial as spies. The United States privately sent a stern warning through intermediaries that this would lead to grave consequences, including military action. Carter repeated the warning in a meeting with the families of the hostages, and elsewhere; and it then appeared in the *New York Times* in several articles. There were several options available, including blockading Iran's ports and mining its waters.<sup>43</sup>

The violence in Iran spilled over into Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. In Saudi Arabia a group of radicals invaded the mosque in Mecca, and an Indian newspaper reported that Americans were involved. This in turn sparked riots in Pakistan, and radicals attacked

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<sup>43</sup> See, for example, "Carter Shifts Stand," *New York Times*, November 21, 1979; <sup>43</sup> Captain David M. Gist, United States Navy (retired), Commander of A7E Corsairs II Squadron (Attack Squadron 82) on the U.S.S. *Nimitz* during the mission. Personal interview August 13, 2007

and burned the United States embassy, killing an American sergeant. The entire Gulf region shook with violence. The public and Congress both strongly supported Carter's restraint as well as his resoluteness in refusing to capitulate to Iranian blackmail. The administration tried to keep the public informed while at the same time protecting its confidential sources. There was intensive scrutiny by the press.<sup>44</sup> As the crisis wore on there were many ups and downs; and Carter's attempts to keep the public informed turned on him. He was attacked by the right as weak and vacillating, but this really described the Iranians, not Carter. Time and again they negotiated in bad faith, and strung the United States along.

### *Sanctions*

Carter wanted suggestions for biting sanctions that would prod Iran and put more pressure on the international community to force it to comply with international law. Brzezinski recalls that there were various excuses for inaction by the different departments. For example, the State Department was appalled when Brzezinski suggested that the United States should punish Iranian diplomats in the same manner as Iran had punished Americans; the Justice Department came up with reason after reason why no action could be taken against Iranians in the US; and Treasury came up with complicated excuses why economic sanctions would be counterproductive. The list went on. Nonetheless, a series of measures were adopted. On the day before Carter ordered Iranian "students" out of the country, the United States announced that it was deporting all Iranians who were in the United States illegally. Pressure grew more intense. Apart from the military option, a logical next step was to tighten the economic noose around

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<sup>44</sup> Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah*, 210; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 378-380; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 474-476. See also Dorman and Farhang, *The United States Press and Iran*; Mark J. Rozell, *The Press and the Carter Presidency* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), especially Chapter 5,

Iran's neck. State and Treasury Department officials coordinated action with United States allies. However, it soon became apparent that even the United States closest allies had no taste for an oil embargo against their countries, nor would they endanger their own diplomatic arrangements for the sake of American hostages. Only direct United States action would have any real effect on the state of affairs.

Two days later after expelling the Iranians, Carter ordered that oil purchases from Iran were to be discontinued, an act of considerable courage; then Iran countered with an oil embargo against the US. It was then that Carter ordered the freeze on official Iranian assets in the US. It applied to assets in United States banks, foreign branches, and subsidiaries. The Iranians said they would not repay its foreign debts, then filed suit in New York State Supreme Court against the shah, asking for \$56.5 billion in damages.<sup>45</sup> One theory on the freeze of Iranian assets postulates that certain United States banks, especially Chase Manhattan, were in a declining financial situation, and believed it was necessary to provoke an incident so that Iranian assets, which were deposited in Chase, could be seized. The Iranian government was methodically withdrawing its deposits, which was alarming in itself, but the government also hinted that it might not honor all the shah's loans, especially those that involved the shah's old friend David Rockefeller. The deposits remaining were approaching the amount of the loans, and bank officials were frustrated because the Iranians always paid the interest on time. The needed incident came when the shah was allowed into the country for medical treatment, which helped to provoke the hostage taking. Ten days later Carter froze Iranian assets in the

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<sup>45</sup>For details see "Blocking Iranian Government Property, Non-Classified, Executive Order 12170, November 14, 1979, Collection: Terrorism and United States Policy, 1968-2002, available at [www.nsecurityarchives.chadwyck.com](http://www.nsecurityarchives.chadwyck.com) accessed 15 December 2007.

US. The American banks interpreted the freeze order to include assets located in their foreign branches.<sup>46</sup>

There is disagreement over whether sanctions accomplish their goals. Makio Miyagawa argues that the hostages were freed in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions; Peter van Ham says that while the economic sanctions on Iran were useful in demonstrating the West's firm resolve, in communicating political messages, and in setting in motion the "mechanism of deterrence and compellence," the larger question of whether they work was left unanswered. Mahvash Alerassool argues that the purpose of the sanctions on Iran was to exert pressure to release the hostages and to compensate American citizens who had claims against the regime that arose from the revolution. Both of these aims were achieved. In the end, Iran recovered only \$4 billion of its \$14 billion of frozen assets in the United States, the remainder having been paid in compensation. They were free to sue in American courts to try to recover more.<sup>47</sup>

### *The Carter Doctrine*

Brzezinski writes that he became concerned that the approach to the crisis was becoming "routinized," and questioned whether the administration should reassess its entire overall strategy, accelerating and intensifying the pressure on Iran. The strategic context changed radically in late December when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Any action against Iran had to be considered within the larger context of Soviet ambitions in the Gulf region. It became important to mobilize Islamic resistance against them; and that meant avoiding any action that might divide opposition to Soviet expansion.

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<sup>46</sup> Bill, *Eagle Entangled*, 343-344.

<sup>47</sup> See James M. Lindsay, "Trade Sanctions as Policy Instruments, 153-173 for a study of 19 cases; Makio Miyagawa, *Do Economic Sanctions Work?* (London: Macmillan with St. Martin's Press, New York, 1992); Mahvash Alerassool, *Freezing Assets*, (London: Macmillan with St. Martin's Press, New York, 1993).



Brzezinski believed that it was more important than ever before to avoid an Iranian-American military confrontation. Vance also agreed that the United States had to proceed with great care so it would not drive Iran straight into Soviet arms. (In retrospect, it seems quite doubtful that Iran would have turned to the Russians. If anything, the Soviet presence in Afghanistan might have constrained the Iranians from killing the hostages.) In January, in Carter's State of the Union address, he announced what became known as the Carter Doctrine.

“Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.”<sup>48</sup>

Carter was the first president to state that the Persian Gulf was a “vital interest,” and the doctrine gave the United States policy responsibility in the region. At the time he made the statement, it reflected United States intentions rather than capabilities. It was still poorly equipped to respond to a major Soviet challenge in the region, but the Pentagon began to move more quickly on the RDF and got access agreements with Oman, Kenya, and Somalia, and talks were begun with Pakistan on countering Soviet intervention. AWACS were deployed in Saudi Arabia and an Amphibious Ready Group was sent to the Arabian Sea. Also, Carter's opinion of the Soviet Union changed dramatically, and he became more assertive in his policies, not only because of the Afghanistan invasion, but also because of their activity on the Horn of Africa.<sup>49</sup>

*The Shah Decides to Leave the US*

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<sup>48</sup> In Patrick Magee, “Grand Strategy Analysis,” 216; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 485.

<sup>49</sup> Major Randy B. Bell, MSMC, “Expansion of American Persian Gulf Policy by Three Presidents,” available at [www.globalsecurity.org](http://www.globalsecurity.org), accessed 3 January 2008; Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power* 223-24; Magee, “Grand Strategy,” 216.

In mid-November David Rockefeller called Carter to tell him that the shah was responding well to treatment and was considering going back to Mexico. Carter had no desire to involve official United States in any way with the shah's decision since it could be interpreted that the United States was capitulating to Iranian pressure. As the shah prepared to go back to Mexico, the administration hoped that this could trigger an end to the crisis. The Mexican government had other ideas. It suddenly reversed its previous decision to allow the shah to return. Carter was angry and incredulous. It was a bolt out of the blue. Apparently, President Lopez Portillo had simply changed his mind. Anwar Sadat, stepped into the breach and re-issued his invitation for the shah to come back to Egypt – another act of courage by a man who had already performed many for the United States and for Carter personally. Carter was reluctant to have him get into any more trouble with the rest of the Arab world, and even his own people, so he called the Egyptian ambassador, Ashraf Ghorbal who said that all of Sadat's top advisers were worried about the consequences of such an act. Carter was torn between wanting the shah to go to Egypt, and not wanting to hurt his friend Sadat. Sadat, for his part, wanted the shah to stay in the United States, but did not want to hurt Carter.

Carter's other choice was to send the shah to a military base within the US. This is what he decided to do. The shah ended up at Lackland Air Force Base, near San Antonio. A few days later two genuine options opened up – South Africa and Panama. Hamilton Jordan went to Panama to investigate that offer and was convinced that it was genuine. Jordan and the president of Panama, General Omar Torrijos, had become friends during the negotiations on the Panama Canal Treaties. He told Torrijos that Carter was convinced that the hostage crisis could not be resolved as long as the shah was in the US.

Torrijos agreed. Torrijos said that “the crisis is first and foremost the problem of the United States....But it is also the problem and the responsibility of the world community. As long as diplomats can be held like those in Tehran, no diplomat is safe anywhere. You tell the president that we will accept the Shah in Panama.” Torrijos added that Panama was a small country, but would be proud to make even a small contribution to resolving the crisis. The government offered a villa on an island off its coast. Jordan telephoned the president with the news that his friend down south was willing to “accept that gift.”

The shah and his wife were in agreement with the arrangement, provided it had an adequate communication system so that he could respond to Khomeini’s charges against him! The shah left the United States on December 15, but the hostages remained incarcerated for thirteen more months, in spite of everyone’s hope that the Panamanian home to the shah would help to speed their release. Kissinger had a string of criticisms about the administration, as if he and Nixon were totally innocent in the events of the decade. Carter asked him to come to the White House for a talk so they could iron out their differences. Kissinger promised his help on SALT and said that some of his remarks had been made prior to the crisis and that he would avoid similar ones in the future. Carter relates that things got better for a few days, but then reverted to normal.<sup>50</sup>

#### *The UN and the Crisis*

The United Nations Security Council passed two resolutions, the first was Resolution 457 which called for Iran to release the hostages immediately and called on Waldheim to use his offices to help implement this. The second, Resolution 461, reaffirmed 457. Waldheim traveled to Iran on January 1, 1980 to try to break the

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<sup>50</sup> Shawcross, *The Shah’s Last Ride*, Chapter 22; Jordan, *Crisis*, 84-85; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 477-479,

stalemate. The United States position remained essentially the same. It agreed to work out in advance an arrangement for the airing of Iranian grievances, but the tribunal would not be instituted in advance. It also agreed, once the hostages were released, to seek a resolution of all issues between the United States and Iran. Waldheim got an unpleasant and threatening welcome and ended up believing his life had been threatened three times. Chaos reigned. The Iranians also tried to twist the United States position by suggesting that the commission could begin work prior to the hostages' release. Although Waldheim was not immediately successful, the idea of an international commission eventually became the core of the release plan that was worked out.

Waldheim's negative report to the UN opened the question of sanctions, but the issue was vetoed in the Security Council by the Soviet Union on January 12. Carter publicly called the Soviets "outlaws." Eventually, even Cuba was embarrassed by them. The United States decided to move ahead anyway. The allies of the United States remained reluctant to participate. It seems that the president of Panama understood more about the danger to *all* diplomats than many other countries. The allies asked the United States to wait until after Iranian elections on January 29. Maybe someone would come to power that would enter into serious negotiations. In the meantime, indirect channels communicated that the Afghanistan invasion had made some in Iran seek some sort of sign from the United States that it would help them move Khomeini towards a resolution of the crisis. Carter, through Waldheim, sent a fuller statement of the United States position. Without changing its basic stance, it was a bit more conciliatory in tone regarding the grievances of many Iranians against the former regime and the frozen assets. It reaffirmed its diplomatic recognition of the Islamic Republic and offered joint

discussions on the problem in Afghanistan. A year later, the points iterated by Carter formed the basis for the resolution of the crisis and the release of the hostages.<sup>51</sup>

*The Diplomats Who Came in From the Cold*

An episode unfolded that was far more fascinating and interesting than any Cold War fiction could ever be. At the time the American embassy was overtaken, several diplomats were able to escape and find refuge in the Canadian embassy. A few news agencies knew about this, but at Carter's request did not reveal it. On January 14 the Iranians barred all foreign journalists from the country. This was good because it would reduce the madness outside of the American embassy that went on for the television cameras every day. Perhaps the Iranians would calm down. Quiet did return on the streets, and it seemed like an opportune time to try to get the diplomats out and back to the US. Secret agents entered Iran to rehearse the plans with the Canadians and Americans. The agents and the diplomats had to be given disguises and false documents, and they needed enough training to convince the Iranians that they were normal travelers and business visitors from other countries, including Canada. Carter relates that one agent was sent in as a German, with a forged passport. His fake name had a middle initial, "H," Custom officials commented that it was odd for a country to issue a passport with an initial rather than the full name. The fast-thinking fellow said that his parents had named him Hitler, and ever since the War he had been permitted to conceal his real name. The official "winked and nodded knowingly, and waved him on through the gates." On January 25 everything was in place. Three days later the six men were free. Until the Canadians and United States agents were also safe, there could be no announcement of

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<sup>51</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 398-401; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 488; Newsom, "America Engulfed," 24.

the successful hostage rescue, but when the news broke safely on January 31, Ambassador Kenneth Taylor and the other Canadians became instant heroes.

This was not the only time that covert activities yielded some success. Lack of direct lines of communication hampered progress. However, in January, Panama contacted Hamilton Jordan and told him that Christian Bourguet, a French lawyer, and Hector Villalon, an Argentinean businessman living in Paris who had ties to the Revolutionary Council, wished to speak with someone in the administration about the crisis. They set up a meeting in London and established a line of communication. The United States, it was told, needed to create a more favorable atmosphere in which the secular nationalists and religious pragmatists could convince Khomeini that the hostages were a liability. Jordan recommended that the United States should “consider dropping our insistence that the hostages be released before we would agree to an airing of grievances...if, *if* that was the first step leading to the release.”<sup>52</sup> Sanctions were deferred in order to try to make this work. The work of the intermediaries and Jordan was extremely secret, and highly dangerous. The Frenchman and the Argentinean repeatedly risked their lives to help the United States.<sup>53</sup>

#### *A Winter Thaw*

In Tehran the two men were able to meet on a regular basis with Ghotbzadeh, the foreign minister, and Bani-Sadr, who was now president, along with others. The men were designated to represent Iran in finding a way to end the crisis. Bani-Sadr cautioned that he did not want to be called a moderate – he wanted to be known as a revolutionary. He needed time to put his cabinet together, but that would be done by the end of

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<sup>52</sup>Jordan, *Crisis*, 138;

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-122; Vance *Hard Choices*, 402; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 494-495.

February. He began to make speeches designed to isolate the militants from the general public and to erase the aura of heroism. None of this could be revealed publicly, and the American public grew more frustrated by the day.

Many United States allies were also frustrated and Carter had a hard time keeping them on tack. Some such as Britain, Canada, Australia, Egypt, and Panama were staunch in their support; but Germany was out and out critical of the British for supporting the United States position, opposing any sanctions against Iran or the Soviets. The United States had to move on its own, and the United Nations would be the intermediary. A joint arrangement was worked out which involved a five-person commission visiting Iran. Bani-Sadr and Carter had to approve some well-known third world leaders who would make up the delegation. The UN representatives would not embarrass any of the hostages or interrogate them. They would be moved to a hospital so that the United States could be assured of their care. The commission would issue a report to the UN, the hostages would be released, the report published, and Bani-Sadr and Carter would issue statements previously agreed to. This was quite a change in the Iranian position, and a small change for the US. It was now prepared to allow an investigation before the hostages were released, as long as it was not published until afterward. Bani-Sadr told Carter that Khomeini had generally approved the plan. A further meeting was held in Paris with Jordan and an official who requested permanent anonymity. Jordan's report was hazy on some points, but was better than most Carter had been receiving.<sup>54</sup>

The plan was complicated and everybody had to do and say their assigned duties at every step. There were pitfalls, however; Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh were incompatible and this made it difficult for Villalon and Bourguet to work with them.

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<sup>54</sup>Jordan, *Crisis*, 123-126; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 494-498; Newsom, "America Engulfed."

Also, Bani-Sadr was weak. The religious fundamentalist leaders opposed any action, and Khomeini was unpredictable. The worst fears were confirmed. By the time the UN commission arrived, Khomeini had said that the Iranian parliament would make the ultimate decision. This signaled a serious delay. The militants holding the hostages were defying orders of Bani-Sadr and the Revolutionary Council that the delegation could visit the hostages. They listened only to the Ayatollah who was secluded in Qom. Ahmad Khomeini, the Ayatollah's son, finally spoke for his father and said the hostages should be visited. Khomeini sent word that he wanted custody if they were transferred to the government. Hope died the next day. Khomeini, the treacherous revolutionary posing as a holy man, announced that he did not support the transfer of the hostages. The Revolutionary Council refused to reconvene. The fanatics were clearly in charge. Carter informed Congressional leaders, swearing them to secrecy. They unanimously recommended patience so as not to cause harm to the hostages, no military action, and keep faith in the UN. Chaos would reign in Iran for months more to come. Interestingly, it was the Republicans who advocated no military action the strongest.<sup>55</sup>

#### *Hopes Betrayed and Military Action*

After the release plan collapsed, Mondale, Vance, and Carter received a full briefing from the military on a rescue mission. The plans now developed were much more feasible than the previous ones. They still needed more work, however. In the meantime, the shah, ever the gadfly, left Panama and went to Egypt. The press blamed Kissinger and Rockefeller. Carter strongly opposed this because of the danger to Sadat. The shah was not concerned, claiming he was in danger in Panama, which was not true. News stories said, without proof, that he had been arrested and faced extradition in

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.; *Crisis*, 124; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 506-509.



Panama. Torrijos flatly denied this. The Iranians reacted as predicted. He was now closer to Iran and away from extradition from Panama (something that was not going to happen). The captors again threatened to hold trials and punish the hostages, and the Revolutionary Council postponed indefinitely the runoff elections for the majlis, delaying any consideration of the transfer or release of the captive men.

Carter let it be known that the United States was planning more stringent sanctions, and possibly close Iran's ports if they were not released by the first of April. Carter informed the allies that American patience was running out, and for the first time he felt that they were finally on board with the United States. It seemed to work. Word came to Carter that Bani-Sadr would make a statement at noon the next day Tehran time (4:30 a.m. Washington), stating that the Revolutionary Council, with Khomeini's approval, had decided to transfer the hostages from the students to the government on Tuesday. Carter was to respond through the news media. They waited and waited for the statement, but none came. However, CBS News reported that the Revolutionary Council had voted to transfer the hostages, and the Swiss said that Bani-Sadr's message would be forthcoming. Word again came that he would speak at noon in Tehran, and Carter assembled his team at 5:00 a.m. This time he gave the speech. Carter gave the pre-arranged response, repeating it three times to the reporters in the Oval Office. This was a positive sign indeed! The State Department acknowledged as well that the Iranians planned for the majlis to resolve the crisis as soon as the new parliament could be formed. But Bani-Sadr bailed out, and later in the day announced that the United States had not met conditions that had been laid down for the transfer. The endorsement for the hostage transfer that he had obtained from the Revolutionary Council had not been

unanimous. Carter decided to impose the sanctions. Then, Ghotbzadeh sent word that the United States *had* met the conditions. Later, Bani-Sadr said that the United States response was adequate. Carter concluded that it was Ghotbsadeh who had the courage, taking a lot of personal risk to resolve the crisis, and that Bani-Sadr was uncertain and weak in a showdown. Carter was horrified when some news stories accused him of arranging a phony exchange of messages to sway the outcome of the Wisconsin primary which was held on the same day. Over time, this lie became a commonly accepted refrain.<sup>56</sup> As Hitler said in *Mein Kampf* when you tell the lie, tell a big one; then tell it over and over and the people will accept it. This is still a viable political strategy.

The next day, April 2, Carter received a report that a small United States airplane had flown hundreds of miles into Iran at a very low altitude, landed in the desert, examined it as a possible rescue staging site, and returned without detection. It was an ideal location. The administration decided to move ahead with the plans for the mission. On April 3 hopes were raised yet again that the hostages would be turned over to the government. Again, Bani-Sadr proved to be weak and ineffective and the plan fell through. It was obvious they were not going to be released. Momentum moved towards the hawks in the White House. Carter moved ahead on the sanctions, broke off diplomatic relations and expelled all Iranian diplomats, embargoed shipments of any goods to Iran except food and medicine, and conducted a census of all financial claims against Iran. The United States asked its allies to do likewise. The following day Henry Precht called in the Iranian Ambassador to inform him that all their diplomats were to leave the country immediately. The Ambassador got angry and told Precht that the hostages were well cared for and were under the complete control of the government. Precht's response

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<sup>56</sup> David Harris, *The Crisis*, 328-330; Jordan, *Crisis*, 248; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 511-514.

was “Bullshit!” according to Carter. The Ambassador stalked out of the building then complained to the American press about the poor treatment and abusive language the United States had subjected him to. In his diary Carter says

“I wrote Henry a note, saying that one of the elements of good diplomatic language was to be concise and accurate and clear, and his reply to the Iranians proved that he was a master of this technique.<sup>57</sup>”

French President Giscard D’Estaing telephoned Carter to let him know that the European foreign ministers were meeting in Lisbon to prepare their demand for the hostage release. If the Iranian response was negative or equivocal they would take further action. Carter strongly encouraged this and told him that the United States intended to take more actions soon and was considering military options. Another serious development was Iraq’s threat to invade Iran, which the Iranians blamed on the United States. Carter had few options remaining. Either launch the rescue operation or apply “direct application of force,” as Brzezinski said.

There were no good historical analogies to guide the administration. The case of the *Pueblo*, captured on January 22, 1968, resembled the situation the most; and the negotiations for the release of the crew went on for eleven months. No options had been built into the mission in case of capture, so by the time Washington knew the facts, the crew had been moved inland and was deemed to be inaccessible. The Vietnam War also played a role – no one wanted to risk hostilities with North Korea while the country was so heavily involved in Vietnam. Much of the negotiations had been carried on through

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<sup>57</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 516; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 283.

United States enemies; but Carter had a difficult time in even getting the allies on board with sanctions and punishment for Iran.<sup>58</sup>

On April 11, Carter and his top advisers (except for Vance who was on a short vacation),<sup>59</sup> including the military leaders, met to discuss the rescue of the hostages. The answers this time were much more satisfactory than before, and they decided to act. Once Carter gave the order to go, there would be no interference from Washington. Harold Brown said the rescue mission was the only worthwhile way to go. Mondale supported the defense secretary, but Christopher favored more diplomacy, which was logical in the absence of Vance. Jody Powell was at the meeting and relates that he and Brown agreed that the United States had to try – there was no choice, even knowing that if it failed it would mean the end of Carter’s presidency. It was the best of a “lousy set of options.”<sup>60</sup>

US covert agents moved freely into and out of Tehran, and provided valuable information. An unnamed source knew where every American was located, how many and what kind of guards were there at different times of the day and night, and much more. Eight helicopters (two were backups) were to fly from aircraft carriers in the Gulf of Oman to the site previously surveyed. There was a dirt road passing nearby, but the team was prepared to detain any passersby until it was too late for the operation to be interrupted. Carter emphasized that he did not want innocent bystanders harmed and he

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<sup>58</sup> Michael J. Hamm, “The Pueblo and Mayaguez Incidents: A Study of Flexible Response and Decision-Making,” *Asian Survey*, 17 (June, 1977): 545-555; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 281. The allies were reluctant to impose sanctions without a UN resolution, and this had been vetoed by the Soviet Union.

<sup>59</sup> Warren Christopher replaced him, and he recounts that he was out of the loop – had never even been in shouting distance of it because of the secrecy; Harris, *The Crisis*, 342. For a discussion on foreign policy decision making see Betty Glad, “Personality, Political and Group Process Variables in Foreign Policy Decision-Making, 35-61 and Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, “Roles and Reasons in Foreign Policy Decision Making,” *British Journal of Political Science*, 16, (fall 1986): 269-286. For a discussion of the power of historical analogies in foreign policy decision making, see David Patrick Houghton, *U.S. States Foreign Policy and the Iran Hostage Crisis*.

<sup>60</sup> Powell, *The Other Side of the Story*, 226-229; Harris, *The Crisis*, 343; Jordan, *Crisis*, 249.

ordered the men to avoid bloodshed whenever possible. The most difficult parts of the mission would be the early ones – getting to the embassy walls. The extraction of the hostages was probably the easiest part.<sup>61</sup>

A serious question concerned the safety of Americans, many of whom were journalists, who were still in Iran. If the rescue mission succeeded, they might in turn be harmed. The president decided to use the volatile situation as an excuse to try to get them to come home. On April 17 he held a news conference and said that he was prohibiting all financial transactions between Iranians and Americans and barring all imports from Iran, and that to protect United States citizens he was banning all travel to Iran. He went on to ask that journalists and newsgathering organizations minimize their presence and activities there. The idea was angrily received. Powell eventually lost his temper with the lot of them and told Sandy Socolow of CBS that if he had his way he would ask the Ayatollah to keep fifty journalists and give the United States back its diplomats. He later regretted this, only because he wondered if it would tip the press off that something big was up.<sup>62</sup>

When Vance returned he objected to the idea of a rescue mission. He urged patience, lest the hostages be harmed or killed; and he pointed out that generals rarely say they “can’t do something.” Vance had convinced the allies to agree to sanctions and for the United States to make a military move now would seem deceitful. He pointed out that there were still hundreds of Americans still in Iran who could be put in jeopardy. He

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<sup>61</sup> Jordan, *Crisis*, 250; Shlomo Gazit, “Risk, Glory, and the Rescue Operation,” *International Security* 6 (summer, 1981): 112; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 519-520.

<sup>62</sup> Powell, *The Other Side of the Story*, 228-229.

also warned of the possibility of an Islamic-Western war. No one changed his mind, however.<sup>63</sup>

The mission commanders were Generals James B. Vaught and Philip C. Gast, and Colonel Charles “Charging Charlie” Beckwith. Beckwith at first had a political distaste for the president because he had pardoned Vietnam War draft dodgers, but was won over to him because of his no nonsense manner. During the president’s briefing, Beckwith was even more impressed. He recalls that “I just didn’t believe Jimmy Carter had the guts to do it....Before that meeting...I wasn’t a big Carter fan, but the man impressed me. He wasn’t going to allow the mission to be run by a goddamn committee....It was a slick command and control setup....I was full of wonderment. The President had carved some important history. I was proud to be an American and to have a president do what he’d just done.”<sup>64</sup>

There was no pretense that there would be no killing if the team made it to the embassy. Beckwith said that the mission’s objective inside the embassy compound was to “take the guards out. We’re going to shoot each of them twice, right between the eyes.” Warren Christopher was taken aback. Beckwith did not believe that the Iranians in the Embassy would stand “toe to toe and slug it out. Yes, there would be the odd person who would because of religion and beliefs shoot to the death....we were prepared to help him reach his maker.”<sup>65</sup>

The plan was complicated, and the helicopters would be stretched to the limits of their capabilities. Carter knew this; but he had to make the effort, in spite of the risk to the hostages. Their lives were already at an extremely high level of risk because they

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<sup>63</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 409.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Harris, *The Crisis*, 347.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 346.

were in the hands of an unpredictable rabble rouser. There was little chance that they would be released for another two to three months at a minimum, or even five or six.<sup>66</sup> Meanwhile, Bruce Laingen, who was imprisoned in the foreign ministry building sent a message through the Swiss ambassador recommending that the United States take strong action against Iran. With the Charge's recommendation, and with no end in sight, Carter gave the order to proceed. Right up to the time of the mission Carter received intelligence information through United States agents in Iran, who were optimistic about the mission.

Secrecy was of the utmost importance. Carter decided to inform one or two Congressmen prior to the mission, and to inform more of the leadership after the mission was well underway. The United States was forced to share the information with the British government when a former British officer in Oman, who was in the employ of the sultan, sent reports to London that the United States had planes in Oman and they were loaded with ammunition and supplies for the Afghan freedom fighters. Christopher went to London to brief Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Foreign Minister Peter Carrington about the true purpose of the planes. Carter consulted with Senator Robert Byrd about informing Congress, telling him that the mission was imminent, but not disclosing the exact timing. The required military equipment also had to be moved into position at key locations in the Middle East under the cover of other routine activities.

In the meantime, the USS *Nimitz*, the aircraft carrier from which the helicopters were to take off, had already spent over ninety days at sea in the Indian Ocean because of the tensions over Iran; but at the time of the decision it was in the Mediterranean. It

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<sup>66</sup> This information came from a high level Iranian government official in a secret meeting with Hamilton Jordan in Europe, see Jordan, *Crisis*, 251; Kenneth E. Morris, *Jimmy Carter: American Moralist* (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 276; Harris, *The Crisis*, 348..

charged full speed around the Cape Route and on to the Gulf of Oman, outrunning some of its battle group. Some of its air wing had to be moved to Diego Garcia to make room for the RH-53 helicopters; it got rid of its anti-submarine aircraft but kept most of its fighters and attack planes in case they were needed. Supposedly they might have to respond to something concerning Iran. The men on the carrier did not know a great deal, especially when a “lot of people came aboard.” The *Nimitz* crew assumed “something big” was about to happen. The deck was so cluttered with RH-53s that their own aircraft could not fly as much as usual for several days. A few days before the rescue attempt, air wing personnel were to identify the aircraft as friendly. They painted stripes on the underside of their planes’ wings, for identification purposes, the same as United States forces had done in preparation for D-Day.<sup>67</sup>

On April 24 the operation began; it became “one of the worst days of Carter’s life.”<sup>68</sup> First, the helicopters ran into unpredicted dust storms, and two went down. Also, Iran spotted two low flying aircraft with no lights. Then another helicopter had hydraulic problems leaving the team with fewer helicopters than needed. Both commanders, Beckwith who was on the ground, and Vaught who was in Egypt recommended to abort. Carter went along with their recommendation. Then things got worse. One helicopter, trying to refuel, crashed into a C130, killing eight men and critically burning three more.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Gist, Personal interview August 13, 2007.

<sup>68</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 524. Sick, *All Fall Down*, 281; Gazit, “Risk, Glory, and the Rescue Operation,” 111.

<sup>69</sup> Stephen T. Hosmer, *Constraints on United States Strategy in Third World Conflicts*, (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1987), 55. One small success was that the presence of the United States Navy in the Persian Gulf, plus the rescue mission served to hint that other options were available, and to deter Iranian moves against other Gulf states. See Harold Brown, *Thinking About National Security*, 174; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 528; Jordan, *Crisis*, 271-273; Harris, *The Crisis*, 360.



Carter was stunned at the loss of life and insisted that he wanted to call the next of kin personally. Brown talked him out of this. Carter had overwhelming support from United States allies, especially Anwar Sadat. Even Henry Kissinger supported the effort and made a statement to the media to this effect. Delta force, as the rescue team was called, was devastated at the failure. Colonel Beckwith asked if Carter would let them try again; but by this time the hostages were being dispersed to unknown locations, Iran's vigilance would be even higher, there was no alternate plan, and to repeat the mission could be suicidal.<sup>70</sup>

Congressional hearings were held almost immediately. Congress wanted to know whether the "failure was symptomatic of serious problems in the Defense Department, or is an isolated failure." Secretary of the Navy, W. Graham Claytor testified that the military people charged with constructing a rescue mission thought that they had come up with a feasible plan. They knew that the mission would be difficult because of the distance of Tehran from the aircraft carriers, but it was not impossible. Getting to the intermediate refueling location was the most difficult part. In spite of this, everyone involved thought it had an excellent chance of success. Air Force Lieutenant General John S. Pustay also testified. He noted that equipment failures included navigational equipment, rotor blade failure, and hydraulic failure. Congress was highly alarmed that three of eight helicopters failed on the mission after they had "been talking around here all year about readiness and maintenance and spare parts and mission capable aircraft." The mission capable numbers were poor; and there was some disagreement between the members of the subcommittee and the military on just how poor. Pustay said that the Navy RH-53 helicopter, which was used on the mission, was at 54 percent for its regular

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<sup>70</sup> Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 443.

role of minesweeping. Pustay pointed out that in a heavy lift role its readiness level was at 80 percent. Jack Edwards, congressman from Alabama, cited a document which said that the mission capable rate was 45.1 percent; the fully mission capable rate was only 17.3 percent. The subcommittee thought the military cut the margin of safety too close, but the military disagreed.<sup>71</sup> Congress also asked about maintenance for the helicopters. Had they been given the routine once-over or did they get special attention? The testimony indicated that high quality maintenance was the order. However, the *Nimitz* had no facilities or personnel trained for RH-53 helicopter maintenance. The RH-53 squadrons and the marine air crews brought their own people for the job, and only routine maintenance could have been given under the circumstances.<sup>72</sup>

Later analysis on the part of the military revealed what some believe to be flaws in the United States's ability to conduct unconventional warfare, especially the lack of a "joint perspective." A six-officer review group headed by Admiral James L. Holloway III delved into the military aspects of the failed attempt. Initially, the opinion of the six was that the operation had been poorly planned and poorly executed. They later changed their minds. Every member changed his opinion to one of the "greatest admiration for the people who planned and tried to execute the most difficult operation you could possibly have undertaken." Holloway said he thought the "mission had a 60 to 70% chance of success and ran into some terribly bad luck." It offered the "best chance of getting the hostages out alive and the least danger of starting a war with Iran." The Holloway concluded that the risks were manageable, there was a good chance for success, and the decision to attempt the rescue was justified. One military change that

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<sup>71</sup>U.S. House Committee Appropriations, subcommittee of Defense Appropriations for 1981, 96<sup>th</sup> Cong. .2d sess., 1980, 606-628 passim.

<sup>72</sup> Gist, personal interview, August 13, 2007.

came about as a result of the failed rescue attempt, was the spread of the principle of joint operations (interoperability) for the United States armed forces, which was codified in the Goldwater-Nichols Act, and the Cohen-Nunn Act which consolidated Special Forces under a United States Special Operations Command. It was like a Phoenix rising from the ashes.<sup>73</sup>

### *The Press*

In his press conference of April 19, 1980, Carter shared his grief over the failure of the mission. However, he said that

“There is a deeper failure than that of incomplete success, and that is the failure to attempt a worthy effort, a failure to try. This is a sentiment shared by the men who went on the mission.” “As they left Iran, following an unpredictable accident during the withdrawal stage, with eight of their fellow warriors dead, they carefully released, without harm, 44 Iranians who had passed by the site and who were detained to protect the integrity of the mission. This is in sharp comparison to the ghoulish action of the terrorists and some of the Government officials in Iran, in our Embassy this weekend, who displayed in a horrible exhibition of inhumanity the bodies of our courageous Americans. This has aroused the disgust and contempt of the rest of the world and indicates quite clearly the kinds of people with whom we have been dealing in a peaceful effort to secure a resolution of this crisis.”<sup>74</sup>

Judy Woodruff of NBC News actually asked why Carter was allowing his time to be dominated by the hostage crisis when there were other international crises that needed attention. Obviously, there were other things on his agenda. Since the hostages had been taken captive, Carter had also worked on the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, forged a policy regarding the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan, as well as domestic issues of inflation and unemployment.

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<sup>73</sup> *Washington Post*, April 24, 2005.

<sup>74</sup> Carter’s Press Conference, April 29, 1980, John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted), Gerhard Peters (database). Available from World Wide Web: [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid), accessed 23 December 2007.

Carter also had to respond to a rash of false news reports. One was that he had cut back on Defense Department plans and thus made them inoperable; that Colonel Beckwith and his men had not wanted to abort and Carter had terminated the mission over their objections, accusations that were patently untrue. Beckwith met with Carter in the Oval Office and gave Carter high praise, saying, with some embarrassment, that “My men and I have decided that our boss, the President of the United States, is as tough as woodpecker lips.”<sup>75</sup>

Vance had opposed the mission and on the Monday before it took place, he resigned, only the second secretary of state in the twentieth century to do so over a policy disagreement. The first was William Jennings Bryan in 1915, secretary of state in the Wilson administration. Both men were concerned that their administrations’ actions could lead the United States into a worse situation than it was already facing and that there were still diplomatic avenues open that should be tried first. Vance thought that the Iranians were close to forming a functional government that the United States could negotiate with, and that substantial progress had been made in getting allied support for sanctions. His views did not prevail, and the administration’s only odd man out was now simply out. To his credit, he never said “I told you so.”<sup>76</sup> Edmund Muskie was Carter’s choice as a replacement. The Vance Brzezinski split was now common knowledge, and early in May the top advisers met with Carter at Camp David to discuss the relationship between the State Department and the White House. Carter relates that any competition between the two entities was of minimum concern for Muskie.

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<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 530.

<sup>76</sup> Vance, *Hard Choices*, 410; Harris, *The Crisis*, 351, 360; see also Howard Jones, *The Course of American Diplomacy*, V. II from 1897, 2d ed., (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1988), 326-328 for an account of Bryan’s resignation.

*The Aftermath of the Mission*

The Iranians were shocked and confused when they learned of the mission. At first, they claimed that they had fought it off, but were soon forced to admit that they had not detected the penetration of their space. However, they displayed pictures of the damaged aircraft as well as the bodies of the eight dead men, and claimed a victory over the Great Satan. The country struggled with its election process and tried to form a government; and Bani-Sadr reiterated that the parliament would make the final decision on the hostages. In July the shah died. The original cause of the crisis was now moot. Iran was a mess, with high inflation, unemployment at 40 percent, and oil revenues that had shrunk to half the level necessary to keep the government operational. It was under attack by the Kurds, threatened by other Iraqis and all the while they continued their attacks on each other.

The rhetoric in Iran cooled down, but Carter still maintained pressure with the trade embargo. The United States patrolled the seas off the coast of Iran and reminded Iran that it could drastically interrupt their commerce if they put the hostages on trial, and threatened military action if any were harmed. The hostage problem continued to be a fact of daily life. Several months of Iranian inaction followed. Eventually, Bani-Sadr told Khomeini that the hostage situation had to be resolved. The country desperately needed to prepare for war, and that meant the blockade had to be lifted. The hostages were returned to Tehran, but not to the embassy compound. They ended up in a prison built during the shah's reign, which was still being used to torture Iranians. For the first time, they were under the control of the government.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Harris, *The Crisis*, 374-78.

Finally, there was a gesture. An emissary of the Ayatollah, Sadegh Tabatabai, sent word through the German foreign minister Hans Dietrich Genscher that he wanted to talk to a high level American official to work out terms for the release of the hostages. The new proposals were generally acceptable. At the time the Soviets were building up their forces along the Iranian border, and Warren Christopher was sent to Europe to inform Britain, France, and Germany about this and discuss how to coordinate the warning to the Soviets. Secretly, he also met with Tabatabai, who said he would give a favorable recommendation to Khomeini.<sup>78</sup>

Bad luck interjected once again. The Iraqis invaded Iran on September 22, the very day that Tabatabai was due back in Iran. The Iranians accused Carter of plotting this, citing a meeting between Brzezinski and Hussein held in Jordan in July, a meeting that Brzezinski, his colleagues, and the White House records claim never happened. That did not matter to the Iranians, and they still cite it today. Their attention shifted away from the hostages and to defending their country. Iran was totally disorganized and could not use their military effectively, but were also paranoid about their Arab neighbors and threatened Saudi Arabia and Oman. The United States discouraged these states from allowing Iraq to launch attacks from their countries and deployed some AWACS to the Arabian Peninsula to help in their defense. Carter also prepared to send some F-15s. A limited war continued, but Tabatabai was soon back in Bonn and the Iranian parliament was discussing the terms for releasing the captives. The Germans reported that the hostages were all back in the embassy, in good condition, and top Iranian officials seemed to feel it was time to return them. However, they suggested a phased release, in four groups, provided the United States agreed sequentially to some of their demands.

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<sup>78</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 566-68

Although this would have been a good sign of progress (something that might help in the campaign) Carter rejected it, consistently replying “We want them all.”<sup>79</sup> No one group was more worthy than another.

When the Iranian Prime Minister, Mohammed Ali Rajai, came to New York in October 1980 to plead the Iranians’ case against Iraq in the UN, Carter suggested that he speak with Muskie. He refused; however, the American position was driven home to him by UN representatives of dozens of nations. They would not consider any of Rajai’s complaints as long as Iran held the Americans. Iran could continue to suffer under the brunt of Saddam Hussein’s attacks and the commercial embargo.

Late in October word came that Khomeini and the captors were ready to end the stalemate. But there were hardliners who held out; they simply did not show up at parliament. Finally, two days before the American election word came that the *majlis* had finally gotten a quorum and had voted to approve of the release agreement. Carter knew that if the hostages were released he would probably be re-elected; if not, he would almost surely lose. He was in Chicago on the campaign trail when the news came and he returned immediately to Washington. On reading the terms of the release, Carter realized that the two sides were still far apart. The United States did not reject the proposal outright and drafted a response to keep the discussions going. Word came that Khomeini had told the militants to turn over the hostages to the government so that the students could help in the war effort, and the government announced that the Algerians would be responsible for the hostages. The United States did not know what that meant, and as the

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<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 569. Harris, *The Crisis*, 374-78, 388-393.

hours passed no other news came.<sup>80</sup> The hostage story dominated the press, and when they were not released, Carter was defeated by Ronald Reagan.

Still, the hostage situation dominated Carter. There was a great deal of opposition in Iran to freeing them in spite of the suffering of Iran itself, and much of the Carter administration was pessimistic. Christopher went over the United States proposal with the Algerian team, who thought it was reasonable, Carter decided to let Iran know that it was the final offer. If they refused it they would have to start all over some time the next year. Christopher went to Algeria to meet with their Foreign Minister Mohammad Benyahia to impress upon him the finality of the United States position, which had not changed materially since the first proposal almost a year previous. The Iranians moved Bruce Laingen and his two fellow diplomats from the foreign ministry to another location so that they could be with the other hostages and a few days later the Iranians sent a response to the United States which verged on acceptance. The Iranian leaders asked the *majlis* to authorize negotiations with the United States through Algeria to resolve the issue. Christopher and Carter talked on Saturday night, January 17, and Christopher thought there could be an agreement by noon Sunday. Work continued unabated in Algeria and Tehran and by noon on Sunday Carter had signed the documents.

The transfer of Iranian assets was completed early on the morning of January 20. There was nothing to do but wait. The hostages were expected to arrive in Germany on January 21; and Reagan made an airplane available to Carter to meet them there. There was, however, no movement in Tehran. Gary Sick stayed in touch with an aide to Carter throughout the inauguration ceremony so that he could relay any news to him through a Secret Service agent. Hamilton Jordan was with Sick and both had phones pressed

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<sup>80</sup> Harris, *The Crisis*, 397; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 576.



against both ears and eyes on the television. One of the phones connected them to Carter in his limousine as he rode with President-elect Reagan to the inauguration. The other connected to an intelligence officer who was monitoring the situation at the Tehran airport and two Algerian aircraft on the runway.<sup>81</sup>

Finally as former President Carter was on his way by helicopter to Andrews Air Force Base, first one plane, then a second took off from Mehrabad Airport in Tehran with all hostages on board. The Iranians waited four hours to acknowledge the receipt of the escrow message at 12:05, five minutes after Carter's administration came to an end. It was one more humiliating shot at the Great Satan.<sup>82</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

By 1979 Carter had succeeded in restoring the moral authority in United States foreign policy, and he and Harold Brown had begun to streamline the military into a more modern force using high technology. The ability to respond militarily to events in the Persian Gulf region in an expeditious manner was underway, and funding of the military overall had begun to increase significantly. Carter received very little credit from the American public for these changes, and the military was mostly hostile to him.<sup>83</sup> Even as Carter took a more aggressive stance toward the Soviet Union, the public became more

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<sup>81</sup> For details on the agreement see [www.nsarchives.chadwyck.com](http://www.nsarchives.chadwyck.com), "Revocation of Prohibitions against Transactions Involving Iran" Non-Classified, Executive Order 12282, 19 January 1981, Collection: Terrorism and U.S. Policy, 1968-2002; "Direction to Transfer Iranian Government Assets," Non-Classified, Executive Order, 12277, 19 January 1981, Collection: Terrorism and U.S. Policy, 1968-2002; "Direction to Transfer Iranian Government Financial Assets Held by Non-banking Institutions," Non-Classified, Executive Order 12280, 19 January 1981, Collection: Terrorism and U.S. Policy, 1968-2002; "Direction to Transfer Certain Iranian Government Assets," Non-Classified, Executive Order 12281, January 19, 1981, Collection: Terrorism and U.S. Policy, 1968-2002; "Correction relating to Establishment of Escrow Accounts," Non-Classified, Executive Order 12276, 19 January 1981, Collection: Terrorism and U.S. Policy, 1968-2002. Accessed 28 December, 2007.

<sup>82</sup> Sick, *All Fall Down*, 341; Jordan, *Crisis*, 395-400. This crisis, along with several others involving the taking of hostages, led to the adoption in 1979 by the United Nations of an International Convention against the Taking of Hostages. See Ronald D. Crelinsten and Denis Szabo, *Hostage Taking* (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Co., 1979.)

<sup>83</sup> Gist, personal interview August 13, 2007; Magee, "Grand Strategy," 220.

disenchanted with him, in spite of wanting a more energetic policy of confrontation. This was at least partly because the Iranian hostage crisis obscured how well the United States was doing in rebuilding its military power.

Military power alone could not guarantee the safety of the hostages. An attack on Iran would almost certainly have meant that the American diplomats there would come home in coffins. Military answers are not always the right answers, although at times they are. Carter, ever the peaceful and patient warrior, did not blunder into a war in the Persian Gulf, just to save his presidency. His foreign policy's weight-bearing pillar remained a concern for human rights, and this included the lives of the American hostages. Carter was not unrealistic, however, and he tried to find a balance between power and principle to safeguard the interests of the nation. This is sometimes referred to as realistic idealism.

The hostages came to mean a great deal to the people of the United States over their 444 day ordeal, and getting them out alive became paramount. Jimmy Carter did that, without compromising his own principles or those of the American people. The United States never apologized to Iran and never turned over the shah. Because of its own turmoil and illegal actions and also because of how Carter handled the crisis, Iran became isolated both politically and economically, scorned by the world community. It lost at least \$10 billion of funds frozen by the United States by virtue of the agreement that freed the hostages, and this was a powerful statement against terrorism in the world.

There are other, related, reasons why Carter lost the 1980 election. One major problem was the press. They made little commentary on Reagan's proposals, generally ignoring the consequences of them, and Democratic voices were simply ignored. Carter and Mondale concluded that they had to comment themselves. This was a dangerous

proposition given the propensity for the press to put a negative spin on Carter in general. Out of a 48 month term in office, there was negative net press coverage in 47 of those months. The press focused on things such as who should be included in the presidential debates rather than on substantive issues, and created numerous misperceptions that influenced the American electorate. The White House press corps had been scooped by the local boys in the Watergate story, and they turned their anger on Carter for their own failings.

Conservative religious and political groups also attacked Carter, accusing him of being “soft on communism,” of betraying American by “giving away the Panama Canal,” and encouraging abortion and homosexuality. Jerry Falwell openly admitted to lying about a meeting with Carter in the Oval Office where Carter supposedly told him he had homosexuals in his administration. He had been there with twelve or fifteen other religious leaders, but a tape recording of it revealed no such talk. Falwell repeated the lie to the so-called “religious press” which readily embraced it.<sup>84</sup>

Carter’s closest advisers have said that he did not want to hear how his stance on a particular issue would affect him in the polls. Most presidents have probably said this, but Carter was sincere. His administration has been referred to as the “trusteeship presidency,” because it recalls a tradition in which the elected official does what is best for the country without regard to public opinion.<sup>85</sup> During the hostage crisis he could easily have resorted to strong military action to satisfy domestic opinion, but he knew this would most probably lead to the death of the captives. The country, however, wanted a more aggressive stance. They got it in the presidencies of Reagan, Bush 41, and Bush 43.

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<sup>84</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, “The Election of 1980,” 563-580.

<sup>85</sup> Charles O. Jones, *The Trusteeship Presidency: Jimmy Carter and the United States Congress*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University press 1988).

Clinton, on the other hand, was criticized for not doing enough, then for doing too much. Reagan made counterterrorism a central policy objective by using slogans, negotiations and indulged in shady arms for hostages deals.<sup>86</sup>

There have been continued suspicions about whether the Reagan campaign team made a deal in 1980 to give Iran arms if they would keep the hostages until after the election. Arms began to flow to Iran by way of Israel a few days after Reagan's inauguration. Gary Sick became suspicious of the 1980 election when he began to research Reagan's policies towards Iran. He interviewed hundreds of people in the US, Europe, and the Middle East, and was told repeatedly that individuals associated with the campaign met secretly with Iranian officials to delay the release of the hostages until after the election. Sick's computerized database is the equivalent of thousands of pages, and the story he tells is compelling.<sup>87</sup> Five years later, another arms-for-hostages deal was struck, (again courtesy of Israel) with the profits from the arms funding the Nicaraguan Contras. With the deck thus stacked against Carter, he was certain to lose the election.

A serious problem for Carter was that there were no good options available help secure the release of the hostages. He followed a policy of flexible response, trying negotiations first, then sanctions, then the threat of a blockade. There was little available militarily to help him. He used the military to mount the rescue mission, but that is not quite the same as "military action." The *Pueblo* and *Mayaguez* incidents offered little in the way of a helpful blueprint. After the *Pueblo* was seized, Lyndon Johnson assembled his team and discussed military options. There were no good ones and none would

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<sup>86</sup> See Russell D. Buhite, *Lives at Risk: Hostages and Victims in American Foreign Policy* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1995); Christopher Hemmer, "The Iranian Hostage Crisis and Ronald Reagan's Policy toward the Hostages in Lebanon," 267-289.

<sup>87</sup> *New York Times*, April 15, 1997.

necessarily secure the release of the crew, which had already been moved inland. It took eleven months to gain their release. The *Mayaguez* was different. When initial diplomatic efforts failed Gerald Ford turned to force quickly to prevent them from being moved inland. The United States sank Cambodian ships and landed marines with support from various naval ships. Unfortunately, 28 marines were killed during the attack and many more could have been. The attack on Tang Island could have placed the lives of the *Mayaguez* crew in jeopardy. The decision makers in the crisis wanted to stop the deterioration of American prestige and credibility. Carter wanted to save the hostages.<sup>88</sup> Some believe that this played a role in how long the hostages remained captive.<sup>89</sup>

Carter had no fixed political ideology, or at least far less of one than Reagan. So while Carter grappled with issues, studying them thoroughly, aware of the nuances, Reagan knew in advance what to think about things he might know nothing about. Reagan's thinking and ideological framework was set long before he became president in 1980. This ideology applies equally to those on the far left side of the ideological spectrum. Carter was a moderate Democrat and because of this had trouble keeping many of the congressional Democrats in line. Candidate Carter had been elected by a hair and he had no mandate. President Carter had a moral ideology, however, and refused to engage in senseless killing, which is why he chose *not* to militarily attack Iran during the hostage crisis.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> See Christopher John Lamb, *Belief Systems and Decision Making in the "Mayaguez" Crisis* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1989).

<sup>89</sup> See Doyle McManus, *Free at Last!* (Los Angeles, CA: *Los Angeles Times*, 1981), 235. Doyle also faults Carter for ruling out direct military intervention, in spite of his admission that it would not work.

<sup>90</sup> See, for example, Robert A. Wilson, ed., *Character Above All* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), esp. "Jimmy Carter 1977-1981" by Hendrik Hertzberg; see also John Orman, *Comparing Presidential Behavior: Carter, Reagan, and the Macho Presidential Style*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), especially chapter one, "The Macho Presidential Style."

One of the hostages, William J. Daugherty recalls that the last thing he heard as he ran for the airplane cabin after his release was one of the captors yelling, “Hey, wait! Can you help get me a visa to America?”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Daugherty, *In the Shadow of the Ayatollah*, 208

## CHAPTER IX

## CONCLUSIONS

## INTRODUCTION

This work has examined five issue areas of the Carter presidency within the broad framework of power and principle: the Panama Canal Treaties, Southern Africa, arms transfers, the Arab-Israeli dispute, and the Iranian revolution and hostage crisis. It concludes that Carter had many accomplishments in finding a middle way between these two poles of state behavior, and that his accomplishments served the long range national interests of the United States, especially from the perspective of what we know now. He used the power of the United States to promote peace and maintain security. He also aggressively re-asserted the idealism of the country, making United States foreign policy more humane and moral. Although he did not totally accomplish all of his specific goals studied in this work, he made progress on difficult issues and laid the bases for further advances that his successors could build on.

Christian pragmatism and faith in American values were primary motivators in Carter's pursuit of justice. He successfully combined hard and soft power and understood well their uses. Carter's emphasis on democracy and human rights restored the nation's post-Vietnam image and helped to win the Cold War. He set the example in the post-Vietnam world, but notwithstanding Carter's reliance on diplomacy and his uncompromising adherence to principle, he contributed substantially to the rise in defense budgets and the rebuilding of the American military, after those budgets had been cut during the Nixon-Ford administrations. He created the Rapid Deployment Force, which

grew into CENTCOM, to help protect vital United States interests in the Persian Gulf, and he ordered the military to find ways to improve interoperability among their branches. He successfully facilitated the Camp David Accords which led to a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, helping to calm the tinder box of the Middle East; and his actions in Afghanistan led the Soviets to invade that country, a decisive contribution to the final collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

Carter understood that power was more dispersed in the 1970s than ever before, and he tried to work within that framework. The rise of Japan and the European Community presented new challenges, because their cooperation could not always be certain. This was especially evident in the Iranian hostage crisis when these allies were reluctant to punish Iran with harsh sanctions because of their fear of losing access to Iranian oil.

#### MIDDLE EAST

Carter fought hard for the rights of the Palestinian people to have their own state and a voice in its creation. Although his hope for a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East did not bear fruit, Carter did more for peace in that region than any other president. The process he began was a promising step towards a comprehensive settlement in the region. He was able to broker a bi-lateral agreement between Egypt and Israel which has remained intact until this day. This stunning achievement, which radically altered the relationship between the two countries, effectively removed the Egyptian army from any future Arab-Israeli war, and contributed markedly to Israel's security.



Carter was highly criticized by many in both the Arab world and Israel. Hani al-Hassan, political advisor to Yasir Arafat, thought that the entire thing complicated matters in the Middle East, believing that Begin walked away from the conference with everything he needed. Sadat was effectively separated from the remainder of the Arab nations, and Israel, along with the US, was free to go about its business of liquidating the Palestinians.<sup>1</sup> Eric Rouleau, Middle East editor of LeMonde, also agrees that Israel came out far stronger than Egypt in the Accords and that they probably complicated things more than smoothed them out. But he also points out that at least three myths were shattered in the process. The first myth was that Israel had no choice but to assume that no peace was possible with the Arabs. By signing the Accords, they tacitly admitted that peace *is* possible based on a tradeoff – land for peace; second, Israeli settlements were not sacred cows, they can be dismantled; and third, territories can be given up and airfields abandoned (in Sinai) without a threat to Israeli security.<sup>2</sup> Burton I. Kaufman is also critical of the Camp David Accords, also arguing that they papered over the problems in the Middle East, rather than solved them.<sup>3</sup> James A. Bill and Carl Leiden were also critical as well arguing that the Palestinian issues were not addressed either thoroughly or conscientiously.<sup>4</sup>

Carter's warning to Israel that any lasting peace had to include a solution to the Palestinian problem, and United Nations Resolution 242 had to be carried out, has proven

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<sup>1</sup> PLO on Camp David: Hani al-Hassan, "The Plan is to Liquidate the Palestinians Politically," *MERIP Reports* 72 (November 1978), 12-13; see also Sayegh, "The Camp David Agreement and the Palestine Problem," 3-40 who argues that the fate of the Palestinian population would be separate from the fate of the Palestinian lands. The population would have some sort of self rule, while the lands would effectively be ruled by Israel.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Rouleau, Mark A. Bruzonsky, "Options and Risks after Camp David. An Interview with Rouleau," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 8 (winter 1979), 41-54.

<sup>3</sup> Burton I. Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr.* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993.)

<sup>4</sup> Bill and Leiden, *Politics in the Middle East*, 329.

to be true, although yet to be fulfilled. Carter's predecessors recognized that a comprehensive peace was not doable, and they worked piecemeal on the issues, as did Carter. No president since Carter has shown the patience, diligence, and the courage to pursue the issue, mainly because there is little political gain to do so. For a president often characterized as weak and vacillating, Carter took the boldest steps yet in the pursuit of peace in an unstable and unpredictable region. Camp David was the most promising step taken to date in finding a solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute. For it to reach its full promise, however, the United States must bring pressure to bear on both the Palestinians and Israelis, something that it is currently unwilling to do.

#### PANAMA CANAL

Carter was also concerned that the rights and liberties of small nations, such as Panama, were not to be violated by outside powers, including the United States. He wanted to work with smaller countries on a shared agenda of human rights and development issues, and to embrace a global community based on mutual respect and multilateral cooperation. Carter hoped that solving the Panama Canal question would send the same positive signal as the revocation of the Platt Amendment in 1934. Although Carter knew he would face a terrible political fight in Congress, he nonetheless began negotiations shortly after being inaugurated. The flag waving faction in Congress refused to believe that, while the Canal was still useful to the US, it was no longer vital. Gaddis Smith is highly critical of Carter's Latin American policies in general, claiming that the Panamanian sovereignty over the Canal did not help to alleviate other difficulties in the region. While admitting that negotiating two treaties was a very smart approach,

politically it was a disaster for both Carter and a number of senators.<sup>5</sup> Richard Falk argues that the new treaties did not go far enough in giving genuine sovereignty to Panama and believes that the Panamanians would be unlikely to be satisfied for long.<sup>6</sup>

Carter was never held hostage to public opinion or re-election, although he certainly wanted to be re-elected in 1980, and he believed in the justice of the Treaties that gave sovereignty over the Canal to Panama, while allowing the United States to defend it in case of emergency. Although the ratification of the Treaties worked over the long term for the national interest, and the interests of Latin America, the victory was pyrrhic for Carter, giving more potency to the neo-conservative movement. Still, all the rhetoric about abandoning the national interest could have sabotaged what was truly in the national interest. Had Carter not delivered on this issue, the United States would have kept its big ditch, but would have been surrounded by hostile elements, and the Canal would have been extremely vulnerable to terrorist attacks. As it stands today, it is functioning well, and ships move through it faster than when it was under United States control.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

Walter LaFeber, another Latin American specialist, is also critical of the Carter administration because of his human rights policies, which assuaged North American consciences, and which he then admits saved Latin American lives. The principles, however, helped to undermine Carter's policies in Central America because, even though they stressed individual political and civil rights, they did not address the inequitable land

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<sup>5</sup> Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 115. See also Ronnie Dugger, *On Reagan: The Man and His Presidency* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> Falk, "Panama Treaty Trap" *Foreign Policy* 30, 68-82.

distribution that produced the revolutionaries and atrocities.<sup>7</sup> Jeane Kirkpatrick also attacked Carter's actions in the region based on his human rights policies, borrowing an old argument that surfaced in the 1940s that made a distinction between totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. Totalitarian regimes such as the Soviet Union were to be avoided and ostracized, authoritarian regimes could be useful.<sup>8</sup>

Although criticized by LaFeber for not doing enough and Kirkpatrick for doing too much, Carter believed that in the long run "right" makes "might;" that the admiration of the United States by others when it acts on its principles contributes significantly to the influence, and thus the power, of America in the world. He is credited (or cursed) for getting human rights issues back on the international agenda. Any choice between "might" and "right" was always made "right." Choices that were not clear left him in the middle, upholding the notion of American exceptionalism while working to secure the national interest, as he saw it. He echoed Woodrow Wilson's idealism in working for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own government, not only in the Middle East, but also in Southern Africa. Born in segregated Georgia, Carter inherited the legacy of the American Civil War; that is, the unwillingness of Southern whites to accept as equal the children of liberated slaves. Blacks were unable to vote, serve on juries, or participate in any way in the political process in the South. This opened his eyes and mind to the black majorities in Southern Africa who lived within a similar system. Although majority rule was not prevalent in the region when he left office, the United States was the midwife in the birth of Zimbabwe, thereby launching a process for the region that could not be stopped or reversed. Unfortunately, when the

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<sup>7</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 269.

<sup>8</sup> See this and other Kirkpatrick essays in Jeane J. Kirkpatrick *Dictatorships and Double Standards: Rationalism and Reason in Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).

Cold War was over, Third World regions faded from the consciousness of Carter's successors, and far less money was spent on development than had been spent on guns and weapons. Much of Africa slunk back into its neglected corner.

Although legitimate "national interest" concerns prevented the massive reduction in arms transfers that Carter hoped to achieve, such transfers slowed significantly during his four years. From the start of the Cold War, preventing communist takeovers of countries bordering the Soviet Union and China became a major part of the policy of containment, with a related predisposition for arms transfers in the direction of the nearby regimes. Carter set the precedent for restraint, however, by giving the State Department some real authority for the first time in the management of any such sales. The trend indicator values on actual deliveries of major conventional weapons in the SIPRI Arms Transfers database decreased from 14,089 in 1977 to 9,752 in 1980<sup>9</sup>. A ceiling on the dollar amount of arms sales was imposed and respected. Carter also set in place an institutional framework that established a rigorous review of significant proposed commercial sales before formal letters of agreement were sent to recipient countries. Nations guilty of gross violations of human rights were usually not entirely cut off, but were categorized into different groups which permitted some differentiation between recipient countries. Safety related items, for example, were routinely granted. Although criticized on both sides of the political spectrum for not doing enough or for doing too much, the administration seemed to strike a satisfactory balance of successfully reducing arms sales while maintaining the national interest. Carter also did much more than his predecessor to implement section 502B of the Arms Export Control Act (the major human rights provision), which had passed over Ford's veto. Human rights got a

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<sup>9</sup> SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, information accessed 7 March 2007.

reasonable hearing, and arms sales to eight Latin American countries dried up. Withholding weapons based on human rights violations was a radical departure from the past, and compared with other administrations Carter's policy was successful. He was not radical, nor did he shift the "entire basis of foreign policy from power to principle," as some have accused.<sup>10</sup> Carter did not simply criticize the morality of other regimes based on human rights, but also tried to return the United States itself to a more prudent and ethical course of action. He practiced the art of the possible.

Congress' continuing interest in human rights during the 1970s did not translate into ratification of certain human rights conventions that were submitted to the Senate as treaties. Long before Carter took office, and beginning in the early Cold War, objections had been placed in a legalistic framework. The American Bar Association's Special Committee on Peace and Law claimed that ratification of the Genocide Convention would endanger the American way of life by interfering with the nation's internal affairs. The Genocide Convention was also linked at that time to other human rights treaties. The Bricker Amendment, which proposed to amend the treaty-making provisions of the Constitution, became the lens through which human rights treaties were judged. It was during these debates on the amendment, that the treaties were branded as dangerous, and they never escaped from this. Getting them on the agenda became politically risky, but politically risky issues never stopped Carter. He signed the Human Rights Covenants, after careful study by the Departments of State, Justice, and Defense, and sent them on to the Senate along with recommended attachments. Although every possible objection was addressed they were still not ratified on the same legalistic objections as those raised

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<sup>10</sup> See Shannon Lindsey Blanton, "Promoting Human Rights and Democracy in the Developing World," 123-131.

during the 1950s, which implied that the United States system was not only superior to any international covenant, but perfect in and of itself. Coinciding with the early stages of the civil rights movement in the United States, this really concerned the dismantling of the system of segregation and discrimination, the opposition to “socialist” ideas, and the notion of a “world government.”<sup>11</sup> When the Senate failed to ratify the treaties, Carter was seen as a president who could not work effectively with Congress.

There were very high barriers to implementing an even-handed policy on human rights. These were summarized in 1978 in a Congressional Research Service report for the House Committee on International Relations. For one thing, information available to the United States was often sketchy. Amnesty International information was (and is) generally considered to be reliable (by many but by no means all), but it mainly concerns individuals. The report also pointed out that data collection had to cover a given period of time, yet human rights violations often fluctuated wildly over time. Ranking countries over such issues was difficult because of the emotions surrounding questionable activities such as torture, or years spent in prison without trial, electric shock torture, and mysterious disappearances, which made consensus predictably difficult, and it remains so today. Also, there is the issue of realistic expectations. Countries vary widely in their level of political and economic modernization, cultural patterns, ethnic and social heterogeneity, and whether they are under outside threat. All of these characteristics play a role in the extent to which human rights are respected. Carter was unable to solve these problems, but his administration, using arms sales as leverage, tried hard to force other

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<sup>11</sup>Natalie Hevener Kaufman, *Human Rights Treaties and the Senate*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1990), especially Chapters 2, 3, 4, and Conclusions.

nations to improve their records.<sup>12</sup> Arms sales as leverage did not and could not work with the Soviet Union. However, his defense of human rights and democracy did a great deal to launch a post Cold War wave of democratization.<sup>13</sup>

## IRAN

Iran became Carter's nemesis. The shah was as weak and vacillating in 1979 as he was in 1953 when the Eisenhower administration saved him, and his illness made things worse. He never trusted Carter with his emphasis on human rights; and when Carter instituted a more realistic arms sales policy towards Iran, the shah became suspicious that the United States wanted to get rid of him. Conspiracy theories are popular in Iran, and, probably because of its history, the people believe that important events are usually inspired by foreigners. In the end, after so many years, the shah still failed to gain much in the way of legitimacy in the eyes of his own people. To many, he was just another brutal dictator. His White Revolution never delivered much on democracy, and the gap between expectations and reality bred political decay. While Brzezinski argues that no revolution is inevitable until it is over, it is certainly clear that major changes needed to be made and the shah was not going to make them. Whether the changes came through revolution or evolution, they were definitely coming, if not on Carter's watch, then soon. Since evolutionary change seemed impossible, the nation turned to revolution, caught up in the spell of a charismatic cleric. Nothing Carter did or could have done then would have saved the relationship with Iran. If nothing else, the shah's death (in 1980) would have brought about the revolutionary change that so many wanted.

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<sup>12</sup> See Dumbrell, *The Carter Presidency*, 179-180.

<sup>13</sup> See Joshua Muravchik, *Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America's Destiny*, (Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1991), 226; see also Cyrus Vance, "The Human Rights Imperative," *Foreign Policy* 63 (summer 1986), 3-19.



Poor intelligence on the situation in Iran hampered the administration, and the options that surfaced for Carter were meager. One, which Vance and Mondale supported, was to encourage the shah to make reforms and liberalize the regime, but with a history of dithering, it was unlikely that this would happen in time. The second option, the “iron fist,” was supported by Brzezinski, Jordan, Powell, and later Brown, but was abhorrent to Carter, the human rights champion. The president also had a strong aversion to meddling in the internal affairs of other states. Iran was important to the security of the United States and the shah had provided at least twenty-six years of stability and security in the Persian Gulf region. A complicating factor for all was that no one knew that the shah was sick – very sick. His illness very likely contributed to his indecisiveness, and he also might have expected to be rescued again, as he had been in 1953. Precht and Sullivan proposed a third option – drop the shah and establish a relationship with Khomeini, but because of Brzezinski’s opposition and Khomeini’s shifting positions this was never thoroughly explored. A valid criticism of Carter is that he should have acted in a way that could have secured influence on the actors of a new regime. Some in the academic field strongly favored Khomeini over the shah, but soon changed their minds. As it turned out, Khomeini was a tease and a wild card, impossible to predict or depend on. Others were also willing to deal with him because they believed he would never participate in the formal government structure.<sup>14</sup> From what we know now, those in power in Iran, at least from the revolution on, have consistently strung the United States along, playing on the anti-Americanism that came out during that time. The divisions within Carter’s top advisers prevented any options, good or bad, from being adopted. The split between

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<sup>14</sup>See Falk, “Trusting Khomeini,” *New York Times*, February 16, 1979, and Bill “Iran and the Crisis of ’78,” 336.

Vance and Brzezinski, usually kept beneath the surface, exploded with a vile energy over Iran. After the shah left, the administration made some strides with the new government in rebuilding the relationship. Business picked up between the two nations, and the United States once again sold arms. The new Iranian government, however, was built on quicksand, and soon became the puppet of Khomeini. Thinking that business as usual could resume was a mistake in judgment on Carter's part.

There is disagreement over whether the United States should have allowed the shah to come into the country for medical treatment. James Bill, for example, argues that this was a fatal error. Others argue that the United States had always welcomed the "tired, the poor, the huddled masses," and to do otherwise would violate American principles. Carter could not turn away a sick man. When a group of students thirteen days later seized the United States embassy in Tehran, Khomeini saw a way to use this to unify the country and solidify his own power. The unifying element was a hatred for America. It trumped all the internal divisions within the shah's opposition. Carter made a serious error when he labeled the event a "crisis." The news media responded by playing up the incident as front-page news, and the television media provided a forum for irate Iranian militants to denounce the United States. Previously, the press had underreported events, saying that the mass demonstrations and threats should not be interpreted as being significant. Negative press coverage intensified for the remainder of Carter's presidency.<sup>15</sup> As Carter worked tirelessly to free the hostages, Khomeini became smug. He ignored the economic noose that was slowly tightening around Iran's neck; and he also ignored the attitude of the international community. Khomeini had gotten his revolution, and now he had his power; Carter was the Great Satan. All was well – or so

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<sup>15</sup> Orman, *Comparing Presidential Behavior*, 103.

he thought. Suddenly, he had an aggressive Soviet Union in Afghanistan to his east, and while he hated America, he also did not trust the Soviets (for good historical reasons). A short time later, Carter announced the Carter Doctrine, a commitment to protect the vital interests of the United States in the Gulf. Khomeini now had enemies on two sides. Then came the hostage rescue attempt, and while it failed in its primary mission, it frightened and surprised the Iranians who were horrified that their country had been secretly penetrated while they slept. The United States was now building up its military, sowing the seeds for what became Central Command in the region. Then, the unthinkable happened – Iraq invaded Iran. Iran needed help, but the international community was cold because of the hostages. Khomeini must have known that he needed to reverse course. Carter refused to blunder into war with Iran, although this might have re-elected him in 1980, but made it clear that there were military options if the hostages were killed or put on trial. This is not to say that all the military options were good. What would the United States gain by an attack on Iran, for example? Carter's prudence and his use of smart power, led to a happier ending than might have been expected. His first concern was to get the hostages out alive. His threat of force, the rescue mission that hinted of more aggressive tactics, the sanctions, and the weight of the international community behind the United States, saved them. After they were released, Iran faced eight years of war with Iraq, a devastating war in terms of men and treasure.

Carter did not compromise relations with Iran, in spite of being adamant in his determination to get the hostages out alive. He left Reagan with the ability to begin anew, especially after the shah's death. However, within a few days of the inauguration, American arms began flowing once again to Iran. During the Iran-Iraq war, while

claiming to be neutral, the United States routinely provided Iraq with weapons, mostly by allowing third parties to them, which was against the Arms Control Export Act. This further poisoned the relationship with Iran. One later connection to Iran developed by Reagan entangling the United States in a sordid arms-for-hostages swap, with a corresponding illegal diversion of the profits to the Contras in Nicaragua. The opportunity to build a viable relationship was gone, and Iran has been a problem for the United States until the present day.

#### AFGHANISTAN

Although this work did not analyze the Afghanistan issue, some mention should be made of it in these general conclusions because of its close proximity to and entanglement with Iran. In April 1978 the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), with the cooperation of the military, overthrew the government and instituted a socialist, pro-Soviet state, the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA). The coalition making up the PDPA soon fell apart, and those remaining in power signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviets in December 1978. The United States faced yet another policy dilemma, summed up in a secret memorandum to Vance just after the April takeover: "We need to take into account the mix of nationalism and communism in the new leadership and seek to avoid driving the regime into a closer embrace with the Soviet Union than it might wish...." The memo also pointed out reasons for adopting a hard line attitude.<sup>16</sup> As a result the United States compromised, maintaining correct relations with the government while, at the same time, keeping channels open to the opposition.

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<sup>16</sup> David Gibbs, "Does the USSR Have a Grand Strategy?" *Journal of Peace Research*, 24, no. 1, (1987), 368, in NSA "Afghanistan: The Making of U.S. Policy, 1973-1990," found in Collections, available at [www.nsarchive.chadwyck.com](http://www.nsarchive.chadwyck.com), accessed 10 March 2008.

As time passed, the Carter administration became more uncomfortable with the new government, especially after the assassination of Ambassador Adolph Dubs. In March 1979 Afghans in the city of Herat waged jihad and massacred hundreds of DRA officials and Soviet advisors. Zbigniew Brzezinski and others began to worry that the Soviets might try to influence events in Iran or Pakistan. Afghanistan could potentially be a launching pad for aggression in the vital Persian Gulf Region. Shortly after the Herat uprising Brzezinski pushed a decision through the SCC to be “more sympathetic to those Afghans who were determined to preserve their country’s independence.”<sup>17</sup> This was deliberately vague, but the evidence indicates that Brzezinski called for moderate covert support for Afghan rebel groups which had set up headquarters in Pakistan. CIA and State Department documents seized by the Iranian students during the takeover of the American embassy in Tehran in November 1979 reveal that, beginning in April 1979 immediately following Brzezinski’s SCC decision, the United States began meeting rebel representatives.

Meanwhile, the government was losing support rapidly; they had lost control of 23 of 28 provinces to various rebel forces. Unable to stabilize the unruly government through political means, the Soviets invaded in December 1979, deploying 100,000 troops to Afghanistan, potentially jeopardizing both Pakistan and Iran. Ironically, the invasion demonstrated the limits of Soviet influence, but to many in the United States it looked as if the strategic balance was shifting towards the Soviets. Although Carter issued the Carter Doctrine, the United States was not interested in nor was it prepared for war with the SU in Afghanistan or the Persian Gulf, and Carter looked for alternative ways to slow down the potential Soviet drive toward the Gulf and “make Moscow pay a

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<sup>17</sup> Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 427.

heavy price for its intervention.” He called for economic sanctions against the Soviets and a boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games being held in Moscow, sought military access agreements with several South and Southwest Asian nations, and provided more covert aid to the Mujahidin. Thus began a ten year violent struggle over an impoverished country the size of Texas.<sup>18</sup> Conservatives opposed negotiations, distrusting the Soviet Union to abide by any agreements, and United States moderates and liberals fell into line with this thinking. Carter decided to pursue a two track approach: continue moderate levels of covert aid while seeking a forum for a negotiated settlement. The press blamed the president for the Soviet invasion. Carter said he thought that the Soviets had “acted outrageously and ...had made a tragic miscalculation.” He wanted to make it as costly as possible; and he succeeded. The Soviets hung around far too long, and this damaged their military and weakened the entire nation, helping to lead to the end of the Cold War. Afghanistan has a way of wearing down its invaders, and even successfully defended itself against the British in the 1830s when they attempted to expand their influence in the region beyond India.<sup>19</sup> Brzezinski relates that while not pushing the Russians to intervene, aiding the rebels would increase the chances that this would occur. When asked if he regretted his actions, Brzezinski replied, “Regret what? That secret operation was an excellent idea. It had the effect of drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap and you want me to regret it? The day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, I wrote to President Carter. We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam

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<sup>18</sup> National Security Archives, Collections, “Afghanistan,” Essay, available at [www.nsarchive.chadwyck.com](http://www.nsarchive.chadwyck.com), accessed through ProQuest 10 March 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Rozell, *The Press and the Carter Presidency*, 161; see also Mark J. Rozell, “President Carter and the Press: Perspectives from White House Communications Advisers,” *Political Science Quarterly* 105 (autumn, 1990): 419-434; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 482; in the Anglo-Afghan war of the 1830s, 40,000 British soldiers left Kabul to go back to India – one walked out alive.

War. Indeed, for almost 10 years, Moscow had to carry on a war unsupportable by the government, a conflict that brought about the demoralization and finally the breakup of the Soviet empire.”<sup>20</sup>

There are critics to this approach. Barnett Rubin points out that the decolonization process in Asia forced Afghanistan into a “race for development,” creating new political actors and conflicts within the country’s society. The conflicts among the new political actors drew in the two superpowers which put fifty times more resources into destruction than they had into development. When Mikhail Gorbachev took power in the Soviet Union, he began to re-think his country’s relationship with the United States. He wanted to institute some domestic reforms, and in order to do this he needed to reduce tensions with the United States. One outcome of his thinking was the decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. He became less interested in the ideological slant of the Afghan government and began to talk in terms of a broader coalition. Moscow also set 1988 as the date for withdrawal. Although some agreement on Afghanistan was reached through the United Nations, what actually took place was much different. When the Soviets actually withdrew, the United States found that it had different objectives from the various Mujahidin groups it had backed. It became more difficult to cooperate. As the final curtain of the Cold War came down, the United States and Russia negotiated a settlement: both sides would end deliveries of weapons and aid for the purchase of weapons to all parties and would work towards a UN sponsored political solution. The end of the Cold War opened a Pandora’s Box of difficulties, not only in Afghanistan, but also in places such as Bosnia and Mogadishu. Even before the

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<sup>20</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski in Centre for Research on Globalisation, “The CIA’s Intervention in Afghanistan,” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Paris, 15-21 January 1998, posted at [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca), 15 October 2001, accessed 28 February 2008.

establishment of an interim UN government, murderous ethnic warfare broke out. The main obstacle to civic order has been the amount of weapons that both superpowers provided.<sup>21</sup>

In 1979, the Carter administration did not expect to drive out the Soviets and set up an alternative government. Many in the United States thought that Afghanistan was already lost to communism, and the goal in arming the opposition was to impose costs on the Soviets that would discourage it from further encroachment into the Gulf region. President Reagan, on the other hand, widened the goals of United States policy as the Soviets became more mired quicksand. He coordinated cooperation among various partners in Southwest Asia through financial and security means. For example, he discarded Carter's concerns about Pakistan's record on human rights and its nuclear program and in 1981 instituted a five-year program of financial aid in the sum of \$3.2 billion. No thought was given to the political situation in Afghanistan,<sup>22</sup> and when the Cold War ended, multiple independent actors emerged with diverging agendas. Of the two superpowers, one disappeared and the other disengaged, leaving Afghanistan to its fate. Was Carter to blame? There is no doubt that he authorized covert aid to the rebels, but it is unlikely that he would have expanded the goals of the policy in the way that Reagan did. He retained a healthy skepticism of regimes with nasty human rights records, and he would have been loathe to have sent \$3.2 billion in aid to Pakistan, a country that would also be the conduit for the arms moving into Afghanistan. He would, however, have been much more willing to spend money on development aid after the Cold War was over than were his successors. Carter attained his goal of halting the

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<sup>21</sup> Barnett R. Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan: From Buffer State to Failed State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 3, 4-14 passim.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 34, 35.



advance of the Soviet Union into the Gulf, a region vital to the interests of the US. **The** costs to the United States under Carter were small, but the door was opened for Reagan's expansion of both the goal and the costs. The *withdrawal* of the United States was a pivotal event that contributed to the failure of the Afghan state and helped to turn it into a training camp for terrorists.

### MISPERCEPTIONS

It was seldom easy for Carter because he chose to work on some of the most difficult, the most intractable and controversial, issues that the nation faced. His work on these issues never brought him much praise, indeed he was usually criticized for his efforts. He had an impressive capacity to grasp the details of the various issues he worked on, and he has often been accused of neglecting strategic planning that might have given his foreign policy more coherence. Part of the problem was the difference in vision between Vance and Brzezinski, although, according to Carter, it was exaggerated. Although they had different perceptions and priorities, they both supported the Panama Canal Treaties, they both shared Carter's concern for human rights, they favored majority rule in Southern Africa, and they favored a Middle East peace agreement. However, they differed over Iran and East-West issues, and these were major. One thing that contributed to the perceptions about the two men was their difference in style. Vance, according to Carter did not like to brief the press on controversial issues, but Brzezinski was eager to do so, and the press played up the personality conflicts and differences.<sup>23</sup> Also, the administration's mid-term shift in focus on the international scene, while played up in the press as indecisiveness, might not have been as dramatic as some have claimed. Both the

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<sup>23</sup> "Interview with Jimmy Carter, November 29, 1982," Miller Center Interviews, Carter Presidency Project, Steven H. Hochman, et al., in Richardson, ed., *Conversations with Carter*, 239-240.

first part, with its emphasis on human rights and an end to an all encompassing East-West focus, and the second part, emphasizing a military buildup and sanctions against Soviet adventures in Afghanistan, were also pursued by the Reagan administration and contributed to the final collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup> The two parts, however, seem to be in conflict with each other; yet while Carter was criticized, Reagan was praised.

Carter had a rocky relationship with both the press and Congress, because he expected both institutions to do the right thing, and not the easy thing. He faced obstacles not of his making in many issue areas, such as securing the passage of the United Nations Human Rights Covenants and the Panama Canal Treaties, which required ratification by Congress. The treaties on the Canal were eventually and painfully ratified, but Human Rights Covenants were painfully not, in spite of a massive effort on the part of the administration.<sup>25</sup>

## CONGRESS

Some have accused Carter of being anti-political, or anti politician, and indeed he campaigned in 1976 as an “outsider,” one who abhorred the politics as usual that brought to the United States the Vietnam War and Watergate.<sup>26</sup> Congress also reacted against the “imperial presidency” of the Nixon years, and became much more assertive.<sup>27</sup> This work has shown that Carter was not the typical politician. He pursued policies that he perceived to be in the national interest, not his own political interest (to which he was not oblivious), in spite of the unpopularity of many of them. His presidency has been

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<sup>24</sup> Robert A. Strong, *Working in the World*, , 267-269

<sup>25</sup> See Natalie Hevener Kaufman, *Human Rights Treaties and the Senate*.

<sup>26</sup> See Thomas E. Cronin, *The State of the Presidency* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1980), 216.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas E. Cronin, “A Resurgent Congress and the Imperial Presidency,” *Political Science Quarterly* 95 (summer 1980): 209-237.

described as a trusteeship because he believed that he had been entrusted to represent the public interest that would serve America as a whole, not his own short-term political considerations. Edmund Burke formulated this concept well. When he spoke to his electors in Bristol in November 1774, he explained that “your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.”<sup>28</sup> Carter thought that someone should represent all the American people and stand fast on critical issues, because Congress could not be trusted to do so. Members of Congress represent districts or states, not the United States, and are beholden to powerful lobbying groups. Carter recognized that members of Congress, “buffeted from all sides, are much more vulnerable to these groups than is the President. One branch of government must stand fast on a particular issue to prevent the triumph of self-interest at the expense of the public.”<sup>29</sup>

Charles Jones points out that the method of the trustee president favors comprehensive solutions to problems rather than issue by issue treatments. In the popular manner of speaking, the trustee’s preference is for “doing what’s right, not what’s political;” this is a preference often attributed to Carter.<sup>30</sup> Policies were usually evaluated on the basis of their substantive merit, not their political worth. He campaigned openly on his distaste of Washington politics; but he was expected to drop this attitude once elected. He surprised everyone and did not change, and this caused many to criticize him for being naïve and inexperienced.<sup>31</sup> His relations with Congress were bumpy, as he

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<sup>28</sup> Ross J.S. Hoffman and Paul Levack, *Burke’s Politics* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1949), 115, cited in Charles O. Jones, *The Trusteeship Presidency* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 2.

<sup>29</sup> Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 93.

<sup>30</sup> Charles O. Jones, *The Trusteeship Presidency*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Charles O. Jones, “Carter and Congress: From the Outside In,” *British Journal of Political Science* 15 (July 1985): 269.

himself admits, because he tackled so many issues that had been neglected because of their difficulty. The Panama Canal negotiations, for example, had been going on at least since the Johnson administration. Johnson, Nixon, and Ford all contributed to the resolution of the problem, but none had the political courage to take the final steps necessary to give control of the Canal to Panama. Many believed Carter was incompetent because of inflation, unemployment, and the energy crisis, and even though he proposed a number of major changes, Congress did not act on them, and special interests dominated the discussions. The problem Carter faced in 1977 and 1978 was one of image. He was unable to use public relations to get credit for his presidential victories. Instead, he projected an image of incompetence.<sup>32</sup>

Twentieth-century presidents have played a larger role in the legislative process than nineteenth-century presidents. Only three presidents enjoyed marked success with Congress, however: Franklin Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, and Ronald Reagan. Reagan did not sustain this success throughout his second term. Carter came to office with a large Democratic majority, but a huge change in circumstances and had little success.

Carter believes that if he had introduced legislation in more carefully orchestrated phases, he could have avoided the image of undue haste and confusion. He also failed to set priorities. On the other hand, when he introduced his tax reform program in incremental units, he failed there as well.<sup>33</sup> A very big problem was that his proposals had very few "goodies" for Congress to take home; and he lauds Congress for their courage in voting for a significant list of things because it was the right thing to do. He relates that Howard Baker, senate minority leader, told him that if he voted right on many

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<sup>32</sup> John Orman, *Comparing Presidential Behavior*: 94.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Edward R. Kantow, "The Limits of Incrementalism: Carter's Efforts at Tax Reform," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 4 no. 2(1985): 217-233.

more issues he would lose the next election. Overall, Carter won about 75 percent of the roll call votes during his four years in office on the issues on which the White House took a clear position. In 1978 he scored victories about 85 percent of the time in the Senate, which no one had done since the days of Lyndon Johnson.<sup>34</sup> His feelings about Congress are mixed because when the interests of powerful lobbies were at stake, a majority of the members yielded to their pressures. Carter writes of a flawed system and believes that ultimately something would have to be done about it.<sup>35</sup> From the perspective of what we know now, it still needs fixing.

Presidents are expected to get Congress to work for them, and not the other way around. Even when the White House is occupied by one party and Congress is dominated by the other, the president is still supposed to lead Congress. The expectations in the press that Carter would have an easy time implementing his policy agenda proved false. The Democrats in Congress were not Carter Democrats, and Carter's electoral margin was narrow, which works against successful presidential/congressional relations. Nonetheless, the public holds the president responsible, whether Congress is difficult to work with or not.<sup>36</sup> The nature of the policy agenda helps to determine success or failure. Charles Jones argues that presidents are constrained by policy agendas already in place when they take office. Success is determined, to some extent, by whether they and

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<sup>34</sup> Orman, *Comparing Presidential Behavior*, 94.

<sup>35</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith* 92-93. His list includes government reorganization, civil-service reform, ethics reforms, energy bills, strip-mining controls, deregulation of airlines, trucking, railroads, financial institutions and communications, reduction of international trade barriers, Panama Canal legislation, the new China policy, foreign air proposals, and a sharp reduction in water projects. None of these things especially attracts constituents, but do attract the attention of special interest groups who generally finance elections.

<sup>36</sup> Charles O. Jones, *The Trusteeship Presidency*, 78.

Congress can agree on specific policy alternatives necessary to deal with existing problems.<sup>37</sup> Carter's own agenda was exceedingly ambitious.

The Carter Administration also made some early mistakes that seemed to alienate many members of his own party in Congress. Tip O'Neill, for example, was miffed when he and his family got poor seats for an inaugural gala at the Kennedy Center, and Hamilton Jordan got the blame. "As far as Jordan was concerned, a House Speaker was something you bought on sale at Radio Shack," and this hurt Carter long after the incident was over.<sup>38</sup> A more substantial blunder also occurred early in his term. In line with his fiscal conservatism, Carter decided to eliminate a number of water projects which he believed to be pork. Unfortunately for Carter, the affected Congressmen believed them to be the life blood of service to their constituencies.<sup>39</sup>

Not only the presidency but also Congress was changed by Vietnam and Watergate. Congress instituted several reforms and began to take a more assertive role in policymaking. In the 1976 elections more Congressmen either retired or otherwise chose not to run than in any other election since World War II; and this was then exceeded in 1978. The Democrats were in control, and many of them had never served with a president from their own party. They were accustomed to being combative. The large freshman classes were younger and activist-oriented, and were determined to make changes. Carter had the bad luck to lose three senior Georgians to retirement, and power in general was slipping away from the South. The new Georgia delegation was weak in

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<sup>37</sup> Charles O. Jones, "Presidents and Agendas: Who Defines What for Whom?" in *The Managerial Presidency*, cited by James P. Pfiffner, "The President's Legislative Agenda," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 499, Congress and the Presidency: Invitation to Struggle (September 1988): 22-35.

<sup>38</sup> Tip O'Neill, *Man of the House* (New York: Random House, 1987), 311.

<sup>39</sup> Pfiffner, "The President's Legislative Agenda," 27.

terms of committee status and seniority. The new Senate was also getting younger and more individualistic and energetic.

Conditions were ripe for reform, and Congress enacted more of them during the 1970s than in any other era in its history. Most were in place when Carter entered office; and most members of Congress believed that the reforms had strengthened their institution. Along with these reforms came changes in attitude that resulted in the members being more interventionist than previously, because of the decline in the status of the White House due to Watergate, media attention to Congress during Watergate, and conflict over issues.<sup>40</sup> Democratic or not, the majorities in both houses did not embrace Carter as a long-awaited ally in the executive branch. There was a basic divide between liberals and conservatives in the party that was challenging in itself. The voting alliance of Republicans and Southern Democrats was stronger under Carter than under Lyndon Johnson, for example, when he pushed his Great Society programs through Congress. Congressional and presidential elections are less linked together than they once were. Also, there was a move away from liberal positions on many issues.<sup>41</sup> In addition, the Democrats in Congress functioned with less unity and discipline and were less inclined toward party responsibility than earlier Democratic Congresses that Democratic presidents had faced.<sup>42</sup> Also, Carter's narrow victory left many in Congress to conclude that his policy proposals had no public mandate. But, as Carter relates, the most important reason for conflicts was the "extremely controversial matters we would have to

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<sup>40</sup> Charles O. Jones, *The Trusteeship Presidency*, 48-60 passim; see also Silverstein, *Imbalance of Powers*, 125; Cronin, "A Resurgent Congress and the Imperial Presidency," 209-237; Eric L. Davis, "Legislative Reform and the Decline of Presidential Influence on Capitol Hill," *British Journal of Political Science*, 9 (October 1979), 465-479.

<sup>41</sup> Davis, "Legislative Reform and the Decline of Presidential Influence on Capitol Hill," 473.

<sup>42</sup> Orman, *Comparing Presidential Behavior*, 95.

address....” including the Panama Canal, government reorganization, deregulation of major industries, Rhodesia-Zimbabwe, and SALT. None of these was likely to cause enough public enthusiasm to unite Congress, or even the Democrats. Ironically, it was the Republicans who gave Carter the margin of victory he needed on many of the issues. Also, the press, in “rat-pack” fashion, began to question Carter’s competency, leading many to conclude that Democrat Carter could not get his Democratic Congress to pass his legislative agenda. Carter, the outsider, seemingly did not know how to stroke members of the senate and house to get what he wanted. Empirical evidence did not support these ideas, but no matter. Also, Congress seemed to have an insatiable appetite for “consultation,” which Carter could never seem to meet. He was in office for less than a week when Robert Byrd, senate majority leader, and Tip O’Neill, speaker of the house complained to the press that they had not been adequately consulted.<sup>43</sup>

Carter said that he “learned the hard way that there was no party loyalty or discipline when a complicated or controversial issue was at stake – none.” Each legislator had to be won over individually. A Congressional party leader told one of the administration’s aides that Carter was always well informed and always took the high ground, talking about the merits of a project in terms of what was best for the nation, but he had never taken him aside and said that he really needed his vote on whatever the issue was. He never approached Congressmen in a personal or partisan sense. Aides were corrected if they tried to argue the merits from a political perspective.<sup>44</sup> Doing what is right, rather than what is political, separated the substance from the process. Carter focused on developing the “right” solution to problems, then a process was put into place

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<sup>43</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 72-76.

<sup>44</sup> Charles O. Jones, “Carter and Congress: From the Outside In,” 272.



to convince Congress that the solution was right. The Domestic Affairs and Policy Staff (DPS) was charged with the responsibility of identifying major domestic policy issues and providing options to the president on how to deal with them. DPS became a critical unit in the administration, especially as Carter learned over time that policy politics was an important element in success.<sup>45</sup> The DPS was free to work on all aspects of issues, including the political, and this resulted in a better operation by 1980. The Office of Management and Budget was another resource Carter used to achieve his goals, because of its wealth of expertise and experience. The Congressional liaison staff's job was to sell the right policies to Congress with as little trade off as was possible. They had to do this and still allow the president to maintain his independence, which Carter interpreted as strength. He achieved a number of victories on issues that were unpopular in Congress – executive re-organization, energy conservation and deregulation, ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties, and the elimination of some water projects.<sup>46</sup> The press gave him little credit. For example, when the Panama Canal Treaties were ratified, the press played up the courage of the Senators voting to pass them, rather than to the Carter team, giving the Senate the public relations victory.

To a great extent, these successes came because Carter used the same attributes that served him well when working on problems such as the Middle East or the Panama Canal – patience, diligence, steadfastness, and prudence. They also came in spite of the fact that some of the reforms in the organization of Congress undermined the power of party leaders. The absence of discipline or consensus within the Democratic Party strengthened the power of the lobbies, a dangerous development still lingering today.

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<sup>45</sup> See, for example, "The First Six Months," *U.S. News and World Report*, July 25, 1977; David Broder, "The President Who Came in From the Outside," *Washington Post* July 31, 1977.

<sup>46</sup> Charles O. Jones, "Carter and Congress: From the Outside In," 297.

Because party leadership could not reward or punish members for their actions, the rewards or punishments held out by the special interests increased in importance.

## THE PRESS

To say that the press was negative about Carter would be an understatement. After his first month in office he never again received net positive monthly coverage, yet he remained especially accessible to the press, genuinely wanting to make the people understand what he was doing. During the latter half of 1980, the press unanimously seemingly ignored any signing of legislation that Carter had proposed, something unheard of. Coverage of Carter was even worse than that given to Nixon during Watergate.<sup>47</sup>

One of the press' issues with Carter was his relationship with Congress. It assumed that since he had a large Democratic majority, he would be a "legislative-interventionist" president. According to some, this was not the case, and he was severely criticized by the press for not living up to their expectations.<sup>48</sup> Unable to fit the mold of former Democratic presidents like Lyndon Johnson or Franklin Roosevelt, comparisons with any of them was usually unfavorable. When Carter emphasized problem solving rather than Congressional negotiations and public speaking, journalists concluded he did not know how to use the power of his office. Not much effort was made to evaluate Carter on his own terms. In a post-Watergate context, journalists liked to focus on the conclusion of the Republican's control of the executive branch and the end of the Nixon-Ford era, giving little attention to Carter's agenda, but when they did pay attention, they

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<sup>47</sup> Don Richardson, "Interview with Jimmy Carter, October 17, 1997," in Richardson, ed., *Conversations with Carter*, 327-328.

<sup>48</sup> Mark Rozell, "President Carter and the Press: Perspectives from White House Communication Advisors," 419-434.

criticized him for focusing on controversial issues which therefore made executive- Congressional cooperation more difficult. They focused on the process and not on the successes he had, which were numerous. He was criticized for not defining specific national goals; and when he did define a goal he was criticized for his choice.<sup>49</sup>

Most presidents and other politician address issues on the basis of how well they will look in the mirror of public opinion, and whether the public will be impressed; not whether the policy will be in the long term national interest of the United States.<sup>50</sup> Not so with Carter. He was never a hostage to reelection (although he genuinely *wanted* to be reelected), and believed he should tend to the nation's business. This worked against him in a number of ways, most notably during the Iranian hostage crisis. Carter's decision to stay "close to Washington" became a backfiring policy because the media stayed close to the story, something not in the administration's interests and this contributed to his election loss in 1980. On the other hand, Carter believes that it was the constant attention paid to the hostages that protected them from torture and even death.<sup>51</sup>

In some ways the country was of two minds after the Vietnam War. For a time it abhorred military involvement with other nations, but as the Carter presidency wore on, and the political right called for more action and less diplomacy, the nation became once again desirous of demonstrating its military strength. Stanley Hoffman's Popeye archetype eclipsed the missionary archetype,<sup>52</sup> and the press contributed to the shift. The tragedy in Iran became the flash point. George Will characterized Carter's sanctions against Iran as ineffective and contributing to the erosion of respect for the US. Marvin

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<sup>49</sup> Mark J. Rozell, *The Press and the Carter Presidency*, 224-225.

<sup>50</sup> Serfaty, ed., *The Media and Foreign Policy*, 3.

<sup>51</sup> John P. Wallach, "Leakers, Terrorists, Policy Makers and the Press," in Serfaty, *The Media and Foreign Policy*, 88.

<sup>52</sup> Stanley Hoffmann, "Requiem," *Foreign Policy* 42 (spring 1981): 3-26.

Stone's editorial attributed the hostage takeover to the president's "abhorrence of power," obviously implying that military power was the only kind of power, something with which this work disagrees. Joseph Kraft alleged that Carter's lack of resolve prolonged the crisis as "public abandonment of the military option deepens the plight of the hostages." Yet, Carter did *not* abandon the military option, and would have pursued it if any of the hostages had been killed or put on trial; and Iran knew it.<sup>53</sup> Turning to the military option, from the perspective of what we know now, could easily have turned into a tragedy for the US. It would take a huge amount of manpower to subdue the country, which is approximately the size of Alaska, with a border of more than five thousand kilometers in length, compared to Iraq which has a border of 3650 kilometers. An aroused and angry population would complicate matters further, and might lead some to conclude that the nuclear option was best – a dangerous proposition in any case, especially in light of the Soviet presence in Afghanistan at the time. There was already a danger that if the government of Iran crumbled, the Soviets could become more adventurous and might have projected themselves into the situation. Brzezinski, who took a hard line, later said that Carter should have taken the position that what was at stake in the crisis were national honor and national security, not lives, and bombed Tehran. This, of course, would have meant the murder of the hostages, if they were not dead already from the bombing. Kennan told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the United

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<sup>53</sup> George F. Will, "Gestures, Gestures," *Washington Post*, December 30, 1979; Marvin Stone, "Iran – and After," *U.S. News and World Report*, 26 November 1979; Joseph Kraft, "Riding Out the Islamic Wave," *Washington Post* 27 November 1979.

States should have declared the hostage seizure a hostile act, which “inaugurated an act of war.”<sup>54</sup>

In any event, the hostages would most certainly have been killed, and this translates into failure, not success. Carter prudently concluded that the military option had to be the *last* option, and this prudence led to the eventual release of the men. Some even accused Carter of using the hostage crisis to raise his standings in the polls and Carter does believe that he would have been re-elected if he had “bombed Tehran... to oblivion, until the hostages were released or incinerated.” In addition to some on Carter’s staff, many Republicans also advocated precisely this kind of apocalyptic foreign policy.<sup>55</sup>

The hostage crisis contributed substantially to the election loss of 1980, although it was not the only issue. Economic woes also played a prominent role. Some also argue that the loss was due to the extraordinarily negative press Carter got during his presidency.<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately for the administration, the one year anniversary of the hostage taking occurred on election eve. The major networks concluded their broadcasts with a story commemorating it, not talking about the upcoming election. Until that time, Reagan and Carter were neck in neck, but that was the final straw in the peoples’ decision. Hamilton Jordan believes that Carter underestimated the “aggressiveness and hostility of the White House press corps;” and many on his staff did not understand how that press had changed in the 1970s. It had become openly cynical about the political

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<sup>54</sup> John Dumbrell, *The Carter Presidency: A Re-evaluation*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 170-171;

<sup>55</sup> Brinkley, “The Rising Stock of Jimmy Carter: The ‘Hands on’ Legacy of Our Thirty-ninth President.”

<sup>56</sup> Orman, *Comparing Presidential Behavior*, 106.

process in general and the presidency specifically.<sup>57</sup> As stated several times previously, from the current perspective, Carter's Iranian policies were as successful as one could hope for. While some called for America to flex its military muscle, Carter got the hostages out alive, which was his goal.

Even with this success, Carter was treated shabbily by the press. He relates that during the transition to the Reagan administration, George Shultz and Alexander Haig refused to be briefed on what was going on in the negotiations for the hostages' release. When Reagan welcomed them back he said "Never, under my administration, will any hostages be taken," a statement that regretfully proved to be false. But the press made a huge issue about the fact that the airplane carrying them took off fifteen minutes after Reagan became president, as if he was responsible for the happy outcome.<sup>58</sup>

#### THE LOST ELECTION OF 1980

The Carter presidency is the exception to the general rule that incumbents usually get more and better press coverage than their challengers. In the 1980 election there were fewer Carter stories than Reagan stories, except on domestic issues, and on those Carter outnumbered Reagan only by 19 to 18. Reagan's stories landed on the front page slightly more than Carter's,<sup>59</sup> but Carter's coverage was usually negative. For forty-seven of the forty-eight months he was in office, he received net negative coverage. The press even stopped covering such things as signing statements, something almost unheard of. The dominant theme in the press in 1980 was that Carter's actions were motivated solely by his desire to be re-elected. Again, this work disagrees. Journalists, who had degraded

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<sup>57</sup> Hamilton Jordan, *Crisis*, 379.

<sup>58</sup> Richardson, "Interview with Jimmy Carter, October 17, 1997, 331.

<sup>59</sup> See James Glen Stovall, "Incumbency and News Coverage of the 1980 Presidential Election Campaign, *The Western Political Quarterly* 37 (December 1984): 621-631.

him for being anti political or apolitical, now accused him of being the consummate conniving politician.

Republicans charged Carter with betraying the country by “giving away” the Panama Canal, promoting abortion and homosexuality, and damaging the family by his support of the Equal Rights Amendment. He was also criticized by many as being too open in his diplomacy, yet he had campaigned against the secrecy of the Nixon-Ford years and had promised the American people that he would in fact be much more open than his predecessors. He was true to his promise, and when questioned about this open diplomacy on the issue of the Middle East in 1977, for example, Carter replied that the American people need “to know the reason why we have not had a Middle Eastern settlement in 30 years or maybe 2,000 years.” He did not believe that the United States should evolve a complicated position in a sensitive region and then just spring it on the people.<sup>60</sup>

To conclude, this work has argued that the Carter presidency had significant success on a number of foreign policy issues. It does not assert that all of his policies were successful, nor were any perfect. He came to office during a time of transition in the United States, and the globe, and was far ahead of his time in his vision of a less ideologically driven world. He tried to point the country in new directions and he never shrank from difficult issues. It took courage to try to solve seemingly intractable problems, and he achieved more success than was realized at the time. Much of the critical literature faults him either because he did not do more on issues such as arms control, human rights, and the Middle East, or he did too much, thus endangering United

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<sup>60</sup> ABC News Interview, August 10, 1977, *Public Papers of the President*, Harry Reasoner and Sam Donaldson, in Richardson, ed., *Conversations with Carter*,

States interests. His Christian principles informed much of his ambitious agenda, which he pursued with patience, diligence, and prudence throughout his time in office and beyond. Power and principle usually conflict in United States foreign policy, but both are deeply embedded in it. The nation swings between Hoffmann's two archetypes of Popeye and the Humanitarian; but the *most* successful foreign policy usually incorporates both, and Carter tried, with more success than he is credited with, in achieving this goal, and the overall general goals of his administration. The United States did not automatically equate its interests with the survival of right-wing dictatorships, it was cooler to regimes that grossly violated human rights, it tried to establish working business relations with non-aligned nations, and it treated Third World states on their on merits, not just as pawns in the East-West game. This was a record very worthy of further pursuit by his successors.



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## VITA

Frances M. Jacobson  
Graduate Program in International Studies  
Old Dominion University  
Norfolk, Virginia 23529

Frances Jacobson is a resident of Norfolk, Virginia. She received a B.A. in Political Science from Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia in 1983 and a M.A. in history in 1990, also from Old Dominion University. Since 2002 she has been a graduate student in the Graduate Program in International Studies at Old Dominion University. Her field of concentration has been American foreign policy as well as interdependence and transnationalism.

She is also Associate Professor of History at Tidewater Community College and is attached to the Virginia Beach, Virginia campus, where she is immediate past chair of the President's Advisory and Planning Council. She has also chaired the college's Global Education Committee and has been active in study abroad projects. She is a regular participant in the American Council of Education's international collaborative. Frances has also taught at Old Dominion University and Christopher Newport University. She has been active in the American Historical Association as well as Phi Alpha Theta, the history honor society, and served as president of the Old Dominion University chapter. Her publications include *Voices From History* and *The American Story*.