

THE WAGES OF PRINCIPLE AND POWER: CYRUS R. VANCE AND THE MAKING OF
FOREIGN POLICY IN THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

On April 28, 1980, Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance joined William Jennings Bryan in the exclusive club of U.S. secretaries of state who resigned in the twentieth century as a matter of principle. Cyrus Vance fought and lost a number of significant policy battles during the Jimmy Carter administration, but none prompted him to resign until President Carter decided to undertake a military operation to rescue U.S. hostages in Iran. Vance's forceful but lone opposition to the mission within the administration was based on three factors: he believed the military rescue mission violated U.S. foreign policies; he argued that the mission would endanger the lives of the U.S. hostages and believed that negotiation could eventually secure the safe release of the hostages; and he was convinced the mission would fail. As significant as Vance's resignation was as a rare political act in U.S. history, it was his road to resignation, a road paved with numerous conflicts involving principle and power, which merits a detailed historical analysis, and provides valuable insights into the nature of leadership and the foreign policymaking process during the Carter administration. This study

focuses on how the disparate values, leadership qualities, and strategic visions of Secretary Vance and President Carter helped to ensure that Vance would engage in substantive and bureaucratic battles from the first days of the administration until his resignation. Vance's struggles to hold Carter to what Vance believed were mutually-accepted principles were an outgrowth of several factors. Although Vance held a well-defined, consistent world view, Carter's statements and decisions over time revealed that he did not share some of Vance's key strategic principles, particularly those regarding the nature of Soviet power, the critical importance of a strategic arms agreement, and the desirability of separating human rights and Third World issues from the East-West context. Carter implemented a foreign policymaking structure that tilted the power in the system to National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, created opportunities for policy dissension, and ultimately undermined Vance's authority and influence. Finally, Vance and Carter embraced different codes of professional behavior that affected the decisionmaking process and policy outcomes.

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INTRODUCTION

On April 28, 1980, Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance joined William Jennings Bryan in the “most exclusive club in America” – the club of U.S. secretaries of state who resigned in the twentieth century as a matter of principle.¹ A public resignation by a high-level government official as a matter of principle, which is “about the most powerful statement any government official can ever make,” is rare in U.S. history.² Resignation studies have offered two explanations for the rarity of principled resignations.³ First, in the U.S. political system, government officials in the executive branch work to support the goals and programs of an elected president. Appointed to advance the president’s agenda, high-level officials understand their role, and do not

¹ Dean Acheson, who served as President Harry Truman’s third secretary of state from 1949-1953, said: “Men in public life who have resigned as a cause of conscience” belong to “the most exclusive club in America.” In Edward Weisband and Thomas M. Franck, “Resignation in Protest,” *The Washington Post*, May 18, 1975, p. 43.

² Todd S. Purdum, “To Quit, to Stay, or to Toss a Wrench?,” *The New York Times*, March 16, 2003, sec. 4, p. 4.

³ Weisband and Franck have contrasted the U.S. political system and culture with the British system which supports principled resignations. In addition to assessing the incompatibility of the U.S. political system and culture with resignation, they provided data that highlight the negative impacts of protest resignations on the subsequent professional lives of officials who resign from office. See Edward Weisband and Thomas M. Franck, *Resignation in Protest. Political and Ethical Choices between Loyalty to Team and Loyalty to Conscience in American Political Life*. New York: Penguin Books, 1976.

expect to be able to advocate for divergent policies. And second, the U.S. political culture, which emphasizes the value of loyalty, poses powerful challenges to public, principled resignations, including the possibility that the resigning official will never again be able to work as a government official at an equivalent level.⁴ Although dissimilar in context and motivation, Bryan's and Vance's resignations were both prompted by presidential decisions that appeared to undermine their foreign policy principles and influence, and occurred after both secretaries had agonized about the ramifications of their decisions.

Secretary of State Bryan resigned after protesting President Woodrow Wilson's responses to Germany in the spring of 1915 regarding the sinking of the British passenger ship, the Lusitania. This German belligerent action not only caused the deaths of American citizens, but also indicated that Germany was continuing with a policy of unrestricted submarine warfare in violation of the "principle of the freedom of all parts of the open sea to neutral ships."⁵ Nevertheless, Bryan had argued against sending harsh protest notes because he believed they would be first steps to a U.S. military intervention, an intervention that he opposed.⁶ Wilson disagreed with

⁴ Ibid., 16, 93, 192, 201-203.

⁵ Woodrow Wilson, "Text of the Second U.S. Protest," *Firstworldwar.com*, May, 1915, http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/lusitania_2ndu.

⁶ William Jennings Bryan and Mary Baird Bryan, *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Haskell House, 1971), 406-414.

Secretary Bryan's "hunger for peace on almost any terms."⁷ Recognizing that "his chance to advance the cause of peace from within the government had failed," and wanting the freedom to engage in a vigorous antiwar campaign, Bryan resigned on June 8, 1915.⁸

As this study will explore, Cyrus Vance fought and lost a number of significant policy battles during the Jimmy Carter administration, but none prompted him to resign until President Carter decided to undertake a military operation to rescue U.S. hostages in Iran in spite of Vance's vigorous opposition to the mission. Vance's forceful but lone opposition to the mission within the Carter administration was based upon three factors: he believed the military rescue mission violated U.S. foreign policies; he argued that the mission would endanger the lives of the U.S. hostages and believed that negotiation could eventually secure the safe release of the hostages; and he was convinced the mission would fail. Vance resigned after the failed mission because he "could not honorably remain as secretary of state when I so strongly disagreed with a presidential decision that went against my judgment as to what was best for the country and for the hostages."⁹

⁷ Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero. The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 237.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 237-238.

⁹ Cyrus R. Vance, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 410.

When Vance became Jimmy Carter's secretary of state in January 1977, the idea that he would resign from his job of a lifetime seemed inconceivable for several reasons: first, from his foreign policy discussions with Carter in late 1976, Vance was convinced that he and Carter embraced similar principles and goals, so the possibility of a fundamental policy dispute seemed highly unlikely;¹⁰ second, Carter had asserted publicly and privately that Vance would be his primary foreign policy aide and spokesman, an assurance that served to imply that Vance would always have access to the president and be able to make a compelling case for his views;¹¹ and finally, Vance had a reputation for being a loyal team player who would not seek to air disputes publicly.¹²

Vance's assumptions about Carter's commitment to his foreign policy goals and about the nature of his power as secretary of state turned out to be terribly wrong. Instead of being able to work effectively and securely as Carter's primary advisor for foreign policy, Vance almost immediately found himself fighting battles involving basic foreign policy principles and his role as secretary of state. For over three years, Vance struggled with uneven success to convince Carter to follow his views on human rights,

¹⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 32.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹² Hodding Carter III, "How Jimmy Carter's Foreign Policy Bit the Dust," *The New York Times*, January 5, 1981, sec. A, p. 17.

arms control, Third World, and East-West strategic policies, and at the same time, to exercise the power that he believed Carter had granted him as secretary of state. When Carter disregarded Vance's counsel and decided to undertake a military operation to rescue U.S. hostages in Iran in April 1980, Vance recognized that he had fought his last battle over policy and principle in the Carter administration. In his justification for resigning, Vance explained that not only had he argued in vain against Carter's decision to rescue the U.S. hostages in Iran – a decision Vance believed violated key foreign policy principles, but he also recognized that he could not support publicly the president's actions, whatever the outcome of the rescue mission.¹³ As Vance emphasized in his resignation letter to Carter: "I know how deeply you have pondered your decision on Iran. I wish I could support you in it. But for the reasons we have discussed, I cannot."¹⁴ Vance further stressed: "You would not be well served in the coming weeks and months by a Secretary of State who could not offer you the public backing you need on an issue and decision of such extraordinary importance."¹⁵ While Vance's resignation was not a fatal blow to the Carter administration, observers noted that Vance's departure meant that Carter had lost the only advisor who "could command so much respect for détente with the Soviet Union, a constructive new

¹³ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 407-413.

¹⁴ "Vance-Carter Letters," *The New York Times*, April 29, 1980, sec. A, p. 14.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

relationship with the third world, strategic arms limitation, and restraint in the uses of power.”¹⁶

Some observers of U.S. politics have suggested that Vance’s resignation has served as a model for policymakers who should resign to maintain their personal integrity and the integrity of the policymaking system.¹⁷ As significant as Vance’s resignation was as a rare political act in U.S. history, it was his road to resignation, a road paved with numerous conflicts involving principle and power, which merits a detailed historical analysis, and provides valuable insights into the nature of leadership and the political process during the Carter administration. What were these conflicts involving policies and principle and power? In Vance’s view, they included his determined, but only partially successful efforts to “distinguish those areas of East-West relations where there is no room for compromise from those areas where mutual agreement is possible,”¹⁸ to promote arms control agreements that were “balanced, equitable, and verifiable,”¹⁹ to advance human rights policies that recognized “the limits

¹⁶ Tom Wicker, "Mr. Carter's Loss," *The New York Times*, April 29, 1980, sec. A, p. 23.

¹⁷ Vance’s principled resignation has been contrasted with Colin Powell’s failure to resign as secretary of state after resisting the Iraq war policies of the George W. Bush administration. See John Tierney, "The Nation: Powell's Prototypes," *The New York Times*, April 25, 2004, sec. 4, p. 3.

¹⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 422.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 417.

of our power and wisdom,”²⁰ and to promote a code of professional behavior marked by “integrity, steadiness, quiet perseverance, and a willingness for self-sacrifice” even though some of his colleagues did not subscribe to the same code.²¹ He also fought to exercise effective power, both for himself and for the Department of State.

The purpose of this study is to provide a detailed analysis of Vance’s struggles for principle and for influence. This study aims to identify and evaluate the disparate values, leadership qualities, and strategic visions of Secretary Vance and President Carter that ultimately laid the groundwork for Vance’s resignation. It will also assess how these leadership disparities affected the development and management of Carter’s foreign policymaking process and how that process constrained Vance’s effectiveness as secretary of state. In addition, by examining how the Carter administration addressed some of its most challenging foreign policy issues, this study will show how Carter’s departures from the policies advocated by Vance and his undermining of Vance’s authority and influence created the underpinnings for Vance’s eventual resignation. Although Jimmy Carter maintained that “there was very rarely an incompatibility

²⁰ Ibid., 436.

²¹ Leslie Gelb, "A Skilled and Realistic Negotiator," *The New York Times*, December 4, 1976, sec. A, p. 13.

between me and Vance,” this study will document important disparities in Carter’s and Vance’s approaches to foreign policy.²²

The Focus on Principle and Power in the Carter Administration

Prior to turning to the analysis of Cyrus Vance’s policy struggles, it is helpful to provide a brief explanation for why previous studies, as well as this study, use a construct of principle and power to frame evaluations of the Carter administration’s foreign policymaking process. The simplest explanation is that the principle-power construct appears to be particularly well-suited to structuring assessments of the nature of Jimmy Carter’s value-laden, often moralistic leadership and the contentious nature of his foreign policymaking process. Furthermore, as this study will detail, Vance’s road to resignation was paved with numerous conflicts stemming from Vance’s and Carter’s different approaches to principle and power.

After positioning himself during the 1976 presidential campaign as a principled, scrupulously honest outsider who could “clean up the mess in Washington” that had been created by the previous Republican administrations, Carter declared that he would achieve his foreign policy goals based on the “nobility of ideas” without building an

²² Jimmy Carter, “Jimmy Carter Interview,” *Jimmy Carter Presidential Oral History Project*, November 29, 1982, <http://www.millercenter.virginia.edu>.

“imperial presidency.”²³ By asserting that he was a man of principle and that his administration would provide a “resurgent commitment to the basic principles of our nation,”²⁴ Carter helped to ensure that his definition of and adherence to principles would receive special scrutiny by the American people, leaders of other countries, and political critics and adversaries.

Carter also emphasized that his foreign policymaking team would operate in principled way, both because he would be managing it and also because his team members shared his values. He announced that three individuals would constitute his primary foreign policymaking team. Although he came to the presidency without foreign policy experience, Carter emphasized that he would exercise hands-on control of the policymaking process and be the one to make all “the final decisions on basic foreign policy.”²⁵ Cyrus Vance, a lawyer, negotiator, and former high-level foreign policy official in previous Democratic administrations, would be his secretary of state, and act as his chief foreign policy aide and spokesman for foreign policy. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter’s previous foreign policy tutor, director of the Trilateral

²³ Robert A. Strong, "Jimmy Carter Frontpage, Foreign Policy Essay," *American President. An Online Reference Resource*, <http://www.millercenter.org/academic/americanpresident/carter/essays/biography>, 2008.

²⁴ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith. Memoirs of a President* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1995), 22.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

Commission, and Columbia University professor, would manage the policymaking apparatus as national security advisor, and would be available to provide policy advice when requested.²⁶ Brzezinski publicly acknowledged Vance's foreign policy primacy and his own more limited role as a coordinator.²⁷ In describing his policymaking team, which also included Vice President Walter Mondale, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, and other cabinet and White House officials as needed, Carter proudly pointed out that not only had he sought and found cabinet members and advisors who would provide "as many points of view as possible" for his consideration,²⁸ but these appointees had also exhibited a "generosity toward one another" that "was one of the most probing measures of character."²⁹ Carter's commitment to collegiality impressed the editorial board of *The New York Times*, which praised him for selecting Vance as secretary of state, for his commitment to ending the "lone ranger" diplomacy associated with Henry Kissinger in the administrations of Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, and for his desire to utilize "to the fullest the expertise and energies of the State Department and

²⁶ "Transcript of Carter's News Conference Introducing his Three New Appointees," *The New York Times*, December 17, 1976, sec. A, p. 32, and Leslie H. Gelb, "Brzezinski Says He'll Give Advice to Carter Only When He Asks for It," *The New York Times*, December 17, 1976, 33.

²⁷ Editorial, "Zbigniew Brzezinski," *The New York Times*, December 17, 1976, sec. A, p. 33.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 57-61.

²⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 51.

Foreign Service.”³⁰ Although some media and policy observers raised concerns about the workability of Vance being “the principal advisor on foreign policy” and Brzezinski providing Carter “with independent staff advice on that mix of questions arising out of the State Department and the defense and intelligence communities,”³¹ reporter Marilyn Berger echoed the optimism of those who believed that Carter might have the ability to direct a collegial team: “Why should it seem so remarkable that two advisors in the same field could co-exist and serve one President, if that President knows what he wants?”³²

Carter’s commitment to the concept of collegiality, however, did not produce an effective policymaking system. After Carter’s re-election defeat, his administration’s internal foreign policy battles and power struggles received increased scrutiny as policy and media analysts sought to understand the roots of Carter’s loss. In addition, Carter and key aides also provided their perspectives about the administration’s effectiveness, as well as justifications for their actions. A striking characteristic of many of the reviews of the Carter presidency, including those provided by key members of his administration, was that they used an analytical construct of principle and power in their

³⁰ Editorial, “A New Beginning: Foreign Policy,” *The New York Times*, December 30, 1976, sec. A, p. 15.

³¹ Marilyn Berger, “Vance and Brzezinski: Peaceful Coexistence or Guerilla War?” *The New York Times*, sec. SM, p. 5.

³² *Ibid.*, 38.

evaluations: did Jimmy Carter adequately define his principles? did he adhere to his principles? did he wield effective presidential power? why did he often appear to waffle between the foreign policy principles advanced by Vance and Brzezinski?

Arthur Schlesinger, one of the first historians to appraise the leadership of Carter immediately after the 1980 election, was also one of the first to use the principle-power construct and to use it to disparage Carter's effectiveness. Schlesinger declared that Carter had "presented no vision, communicated no sense of direction, was wayward and negligent in foreign policy," and that "good intentions were compromised by an odious moralizing tone."³³ Essentially, Schlesinger's message was that Carter's inability to articulate and to adhere to principles constrained his ability to lead capably.

When Carter administration officials produced memoirs several years later, they also focused on themes related to principle and power, but offered different assessments from Schlesinger's, and presented "quite different kinds of insight into the Carter White House."³⁴ For example, in *Keeping Faith*, Carter made a "highly personal" case that he had fulfilled his commitment to key principles.³⁵ He argued that he had kept faith with the American people because he had honored the principles of "human rights,

³³ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "After the Battle," *The New York Times*, November 6, 1980, sec. A, p. 35.

³⁴ Walter LaFeber, "From Confusion to Cold War: The Memoirs of the Carter Administration," *Diplomatic History* 8 (Winter 1984): 1.

³⁵ Ibid.

environmental quality, nuclear arms control, and the search for justice and peace.”³⁶ Carter also emphasized that he had honored his pledge to build “a lasting peace” because no American citizen had died in war during his watch.³⁷ Brzezinski, who titled his memoirs *Power and Principle*, observed that he had been drawn to working for Carter because he recognized that “in the area of foreign policy he would be able to combine principle with power.”³⁸ Brzezinski also suggested, in his “immodestly outspoken” style,³⁹ that his primary contribution to the administration was that he was the only one appropriately focused on the “unavoidable ingredient of force in dealing with contemporary international realities.”⁴⁰ In contrast, Cyrus Vance did not explicitly address principle and power themes in his memoirs, *Hard Choices*, possibly because one of his main objectives was to write down his “views on the foreign policy goals and priorities that we should fix for ourselves over the next ten to fifteen years if we are to

³⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 22, 23.

³⁷ Although Carter was correct that no American had died in war during his presidency, eight U.S. servicemen died in the abortive rescue mission in Iran. See: Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 23, 604.

³⁸ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), 42.

³⁹ LaFeber, “From Confusion to Cold War,” 2.

⁴⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 42.

cope with the changing times.”⁴¹ Instead, in his often “genteel” review of the Carter administration,⁴² Vance reiterated his strategic goals as secretary, and then matter-of-factly described how Carter, his aides, and he interacted to resolve foreign policy issues. Occasionally revealing “his distaste for Brzezinski’s policies and tactics,”⁴³ Vance related the major power struggles that involved Brzezinski, and acknowledged that he did not always deal with them effectively. It is ironic that the individual, who engaged in numerous policy and debilitating power struggles, and then resigned from the Carter administration as a matter of principle, did not employ the principle-power construct that has shaped many of the historical reviews of the Carter presidency.

During the past quarter-century, some historians have used the principle and power construct to scrutinize Carter’s presidential leadership and to assess his strengths and weaknesses. Although most observers and historians of the Carter administration have provided negative assessments of Carter’s foreign policy leadership, a few have pointed out that Carter exercised power in a competent way, and successfully addressed a number of difficult foreign policy problems. Robert A. Strong, who has argued for historians providing greater balance in their evaluations of Carter’s effectiveness, applauded Carter for “pursuing a large and ambitious foreign policy agenda...and

⁴¹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, Forward.

⁴² LaFeber, “From Confusion to Cold War,” 2.

⁴³ Ibid.

working hard to master many of the issues on that agenda.”⁴⁴ Strong has further agreed with the observers of the Carter administration, including Brzezinski,⁴⁵ who have maintained that historians and others have exaggerated the differences between Vance and Brzezinski, and described how they worked effectively together on many issues, such as the Panama Canal treaties.⁴⁶ In general, Strong has advanced the case that “the world is clearly a different place, and many would argue a better one, for the work that President Carter did in it.”⁴⁷ Suggesting that the criticisms of Carter’s lack of coherence have been overstated, William Stueck has highlighted Carter’s human rights address at the University of Notre Dame in May 1977 as evidence that Carter fundamentally changed U.S. foreign policy, and fulfilled his commitment to focus on principles as a basis for sound policy.⁴⁸ John Dumbrell, in his evaluation of the “post-liberal” Carter

⁴⁴ Robert A. Strong, Strong, *Working in the World. Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 265.

⁴⁵ Brzezinski maintained that he did not use backchannels to communicate his policy approaches or to undermine the State Department, and stressed that the media greatly exaggerated the differences between him and Vance. He noted: "On most issues, at most times we were in basic agreement." See his discussion, pages 37-38, *Power and Principle*.

⁴⁶ Strong, *Working in the World*, 265-266.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁴⁸ William Stueck, “Placing Jimmy Carter’s Foreign Policy,” in *The Carter Presidency. Policy Choices in the Post-New Deal era*, eds. Gary M. Fink and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1998), 247.

presidency, praised Carter for being “the first president of the modern era not to be entrapped in Cold War orthodoxy,” for advancing human rights, and for the “triumph” of his work on Zimbabwe/Rhodesia and the Camp David and Panama Canal Treaties.⁴⁹ On the other hand, historians have also documented that Carter, for a variety of complex, interrelated reasons – some personal and some bureaucratic – neither presented a coherent strategic vision of his principles, nor created an effective collegial foreign policy planning system to help him reach his goals, particularly those goals related to arms control and the U.S.-Soviet strategic relationship. Strong, for example, faulted Carter for his “apparent indifference, or perhaps an arrogant indifference, toward the public perception of disarray among his senior foreign policy advisors.”⁵⁰ Strong has also pointed out that Carter’s agenda and the way he chose to exercise his power “may have led him to neglect the strategic planning that might have given his foreign policy more coherence.”⁵¹ Crediting Carter for healing “some of the wounds caused by the Vietnam War and the Watergate affair,” Burton I. Kaufman has criticized Carter for never adequately defining “a mission for his government, a purpose for the country, and

⁴⁹ John Dumbrell, *The Carter Presidency: A Re-evaluation* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 14.

⁵⁰ Strong, *Working in the World*, p. 267.

⁵¹ Ibid.

a way to get there.”⁵² Kaufman also has maintained that Carter was “long on good intentions,” or principles, but “short on know-how,” or the ability to exercise power effectively.⁵³ Thus, from Jimmy Carter’s first statements about the nature of his leadership and his approach to foreign policy, to the first reviews of the Carter administration’s effectiveness, including those provided by his advisors, through many of the assessments of the past quarter-century, the themes of principle and power have been used to frame the analysis of the Carter administration.

This study will also employ the principle and power construct to recount and analyze the role that Cyrus Vance played in Carter’s foreign policymaking process and to probe the meaning of his long road to resignation. While this study will identify and explore the Vance-Brzezinski clashes over key foreign policies,⁵⁴ it will maintain that battles involving principle and power were fundamentally disputes between Vance and Carter. From his conversations with Carter prior to the inauguration, Vance felt confident that Carter shared his key foreign policy principles such as: advocacy for human rights when it was effective to do so; delinking the pursuit of nuclear arms

⁵² Burton I. Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 210.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Many of the previous studies of the Carter administration’s foreign policymaking process have focused on the clashes between Vance and Brzezinski over “tactics, strategies, and goals of the administration’s foreign policy.” See: Strong, “Jimmy Carter Frontpage, Foreign Policy Essay,” The Miller Center.

reduction from other issues; developing a productive relationship with the Soviet Union; building a relationship with China based upon its own merits; and structuring relationships with Third World countries outside the framework of East-West policies.⁵⁵ In fact, Vance stressed that he could not “recall that during this long and at times detailed discussion Carter and I had any significant disagreement.”⁵⁶ Nevertheless, very early in the administration, Vance believed that Carter’s departures from these policy commitments were significant, and that they damaged Carter’s presidential effectiveness. By consistently waffling between Vance’s and Brzezinski’s world views and by rejecting Vance’s specific advice on the hostage rescue mission, Carter created a reputation as an indecisive, even incompetent foreign policy leader that would haunt him as he unsuccessfully sought a second presidential term.

Vance’s battle for principle and power does not mean that he was an outstanding secretary of state. Vance operated under enormous constraints that impaired his effectiveness and his ability to achieve his most important objective – a reduction in nuclear tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. He also did not project his power effectively at critical times when it was important to hear the voice of the secretary of state. Nevertheless, Vance’s battles for principle and power are historically significant for three reasons: first, they demonstrate that Vance held and

⁵⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 27-29.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

promoted a nuanced and coherent world view that was consistent with U.S. foreign policy principles; second, they show that Vance demonstrated a rare courage and dedication to public service; and finally, they reveal the key personal, bureaucratic, and strategic issues that dominated the Carter administration and undermined its effectiveness.

Organization of this Study

Vance's struggles to hold Carter to what Vance believed were their mutually-defined strategic principles about human rights, the Soviet strategic relationship, East-West linkages, and approaches to the Third World were an outgrowth of three primary factors: first, although Vance held a well-defined, consistent world view, Carter's statements and decisions over time revealed that he did not share some of Vance's key strategic principles; second, Carter implemented a foreign policymaking structure that created opportunities for policy dissension and ultimately undermined Vance's authority and influence; and finally, Vance and Carter embraced different codes of behavior that influenced how they viewed the policymaking process. These factors of focus, structure, and leadership hindered Vance's ability to guide Carter's foreign policymaking process, contributed to the key policy disputes of the administration, and ultimately paved Vance's road to resignation. This study explores how the disparities in Vance's and Carter's foreign policy leadership and expertise, the structure of Carter's

foreign policymaking process, and Carter's staffing decisions helped to ensure that Vance would need to engage in substantive and bureaucratic battles from the first days of the administration until his resignation.

The first two chapters characterize the foreign policy leadership of Cyrus Vance and Jimmy Carter. Chapter 1, *The Foreign Policy Leadership of Cyrus R. Vance*, highlights key aspects of Vance's leadership, including the professional experience that influenced his priorities and expertise as secretary of state, his commitment to exercising power according to a fair-play code of professional behavior, and his under-appreciated abilities as a strategic thinker who held a coherent, nuanced world view. Chapter 2, *The Foreign Policy Leadership of Jimmy Carter*, analyzes two of Carter's key leadership goals that influenced the nature and quality of his presidency: his desire to provide transformational leadership and his desire to control in a hands-on way the policymaking process and the articulation of foreign policy. This chapter also defines the key leadership themes that shaped the development of Carter's foreign policies.

Chapter 3, *The Foreign Policymaking Apparatus of the Carter Administration*, evaluates the nature of Carter's, Vance's, and Brzezinski's power in the formal planning system. Although Vance retained substantial powers granted to him by Carter, as well as the power inherent in his deep expertise and work ethic, these strengths were not enough to ensure that Vance could operate effectively. Indeed, by the time of Vance's resignation, Brzezinski, with Carter's blessing, had succeeded in dominating both

policy and process. Had Carter constrained the influence of his national security advisor, it is possible that Vance might have been able to wield effective power. Carter, however, chose to enhance the power of Brzezinski, a puzzling decision because Carter noted that he usually shared Vance's views and acknowledged that Brzezinski needed to be controlled.⁵⁷ The one time that Carter chose to rely clearly and heavily on Vance to manage both foreign policy process and substance produced Carter's greatest achievement – the Camp David Accords. Carter's success at Camp David prompts two questions: first, why did Carter implement and maintain a contentious planning process; and second, why did he undermine Vance when it was clear that he was the most effective when he relied on the best aspects of his and Vance's leadership.

Next, this study probes how Vance addressed the major contentious foreign policy issues of the Carter administration including: the definition of the Soviet strategic relationship (Chapter 4, Soviet Policy, the Root of all Conflicts); the linkage of U.S. policies about the Horn of Africa to policies toward the Soviet Union (Chapter 5, The Problem of Linkage in the Horn of Africa); the development of U.S. policy toward China as a counterweight to Soviet power (Chapter 6, The China Card); the need to address the Iranian Revolution and to resolve the hostage situation (Chapter 7, The

⁵⁷As described later in this study, Carter described Brzezinski as "aggressive," inclined to "speak out too forcefully" on "controversial subjects, and possibly insufficiently "deferential" to the secretary of state. Cited in: Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 54-55.

Iranian Challenge); and finally, the nature of the threats presented by the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan (Chapter 8, Afghanistan, A Final Assault). These chapters describe how Vance encountered persistent, debilitating challenges to his authority by Brzezinski, challenges that were permitted, even at times encouraged by Carter. At many points, these battles for influence could have constituted a reason for Vance to resign from office. In fact, Gay Vance, Cyrus Vance's wife, confirmed that Vance considered resigning several times after Carter appeared to undercut either his authority or that of the State Department. Nevertheless, Vance did not resign until Carter made a decision that fundamentally violated Vance's foreign policy principles: the military rescue of the U.S. hostages in Iran.⁵⁸

Chapter 9, Resignation: Principles Confront the Limits of Power, argues that the principles involved in Carter's decision to rescue the hostages in Iran were qualitatively different from other principles that Carter had violated, either in his policy disagreements with his secretary of state or in his diminishments of Vance's authority. Carter's decision about a military rescue irrevocably undermined the following key policy and professional principles to which Vance was committed: the United States should work unceasingly from a position of strength to reduce tensions with the Soviet Union instead of engaging in a military action that could "force the Iranians into the

⁵⁸ Grace Sloane Vance, interview by author, April 10, 2001, New York, New York.

arms of the Soviets” and thereby intensify East-West tensions;⁵⁹ the United States should recognize that individual countries have their own objectives and are not pawns in the Cold War; force should be used only as a last resort after negotiations have clearly been exhausted; the U.S. foreign policymaking bureaucracy should reflect and be forcefully committed to these goals; and finally, foreign policy colleagues should behave honorably toward one another.

To be secretary of state and to have opportunities to shape a peaceful future for the United States were Cyrus Vance’s goals of a lifetime. But to perform his duties and to advance his goals required that Vance wage persistent, increasingly debilitating battles for principle and power. Vance did not expect to have to fight these battles, and occasionally he did not fight them effectively. Vance’s road to resignation reveals a great deal about Vance’s strengths and weaknesses as secretary of state, and perhaps even more about the leadership of Jimmy Carter.

⁵⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 410.

CHAPTER 1. THE FOREIGN POLICY LEADERSHIP OF CYRUS R. VANCE

When Jimmy Carter selected Cyrus Vance to be his secretary of state, he chose a man who was acclaimed by friends, legal associates, and public sector colleagues as "an outstanding human being"

¹ and a person of "the highest integrity."² In addition, as President Lyndon Johnson had asserted, Vance was a man "with manifold abilities."³ After Vance's death in January 2002, Theodore Sorenson underscored that Vance had excelled in:

so many day jobs!: a successful lawyer for blue chips, a trusted emissary, a diplomat and advisor for presidents, Senate committees and the United Nations Secretaries General, a skilled draftsman of laws and treaties, a negotiator for internal bodies, an advocate for his government, a mediator, author, and leader of his profession and community.⁴

¹ John Maddux, Memorandum to Cyrus Vance, June 21, 1967, Cyrus R. and Grace Sloane Vance Papers, Yale University Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

² Robert S. McNamara, telephone interview by author, May 20, 2004.

³ Lyndon Baines Johnson, to Cyrus Vance, June 10, 1967, Cyrus R. and Grace Sloane Vance Papers, Yale University Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

⁴ Theodore C. Sorenson, "Cy Vance: Our Man for All Seasons," delivered at funeral services for Cyrus R. Vance [1917-2002], January 18, 2002, New York City, New York, p. 1.

Not only had Vance's manifold abilities, which included his ability to think analytically and pragmatically, his ability to litigate, negotiate, and manage effectively, and his ability to work energetically, confidently, and optimistically, gotten him so many “day jobs,” but these “day jobs” had also enhanced his expertise. Jimmy Carter acknowledged these impressive abilities when he observed that Vance was a “natural selection” for secretary of state, “almost unanimously recommended by the advisors I consulted.”⁵

Vance’s Professional Experience

The lessons Vance had learned from his legal education, military experience, work as a trial attorney in civil litigation and procedure, high-level Pentagon experience, his negotiating and crisis management assignments for President Lyndon Johnson, and his deep immersion in foreign policy issues from participating in the Council on Foreign Relations seemed to give him an unusually strong preparation for his job of a lifetime.⁶

⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 52.

⁶ The first three chapters of David McLellan's biography of Vance make the case that Vance had an extraordinary background for the secretary of state position. As described in: David S. McLellan, *Cyrus Vance* (Totowa: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985), 1-37.

Vance's early background, which supported his becoming a "crisis-wise lawyer-diplomat," included his higher education from 1935-1942 at Yale College and Yale Law School, his active service in the United States Navy (1942-1946), and a decade of intense legal work at the Wall Street firm of Simpson, Thatcher and Bartlett from 1947-1957. Vance then performed a series of senior government jobs with dramatically increasing responsibilities. At Senator Lyndon Johnson's request, he became special counsel to the Senate Preparedness Investigation Committee, and helped draft the legislation creating the National Aeronautics and Space Agency. After serving as general counsel to the Department of Defense in the Kennedy Administration in 1961, Vance became director of the Department of Defense's Office of Management Planning and Organization, Secretary of the Army in 1962, and Deputy Secretary of Defense in 1964 under Robert McNamara.⁷

Vance's crisis management and negotiations assignments were similarly significant appointments. He conducted crisis management and negotiations as President Johnson's special representative during the 1964 Panama Canal crisis and during the 1965 Dominican Civil War. During his negotiations regarding Cyprus in the late fall of 1967, he reduced the tensions between Turkey and Greece over Cyprus. In February 1968, Vance represented Johnson at the negotiations that prevented an outbreak of war in the Korean Peninsula over the Pueblo incident. Finally, he acted as

⁷ McLellan, *Cyrus Vance*, 3-9.

deputy chief negotiator under W. Averell Harriman from the early spring of 1967 until the new administration took over in an attempt to negotiate a cease-fire with North Vietnam.⁸ From these experiences, as well as his involvement in the work of the Council of Foreign Relations, Vance not only honed his negotiating and management skills, but also deepened his substantive knowledge of foreign policy issues.

Military preparedness and intelligence were among the many areas in which Vance had a substantive knowledge that derived from first-hand experience, a knowledge that would contribute to his opposition to the hostage rescue mission. As Ambassador John Walsh noted, "With the exception of General George Marshall, he probably knows more about the Defense Department, the military services, the intelligence community, and our alliance structure than any other Secretary-Designate in the modern era."⁹ One of the few individuals in senior positions in the Carter administration who had military expertise, both from active service as a gunnery officer in the Philippines, Guam, Saipan, Tarawa, and Bougainville and from high-level Defense Department positions, Vance ironically was a lonely voice in opposing a military action to rescue the hostages in Iran. In some of the policy battles of the Carter administration, several colleagues became highly critical of Vance's views about the use

⁸ Ambassador John Patrick Walsh, "A Portrait of a Statesman: Cyrus R. Vance," December 1976, Cyrus R. and Grace Sloane Vance Papers, Yale University Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

⁹ Walsh, "Portrait of a Statesman," 14.

of force in implementing U.S. policies. Brzezinski, for example, noted that: "His deep aversion to the use of force was a significant limitation on his stewardship in an age in which American power was being threatened on a very broad front."¹⁰ Brzezinski also pointed out that Secretary of Defense Harold Brown echoed his views on Vance in a *New York Times* interview on December 7, 1980: "Secretary Vance was persuaded that anything that involved the risk of force was a mistake."¹¹ Nevertheless, as one observer stressed: "How interesting, that Brzezinski, a man with no military background and little experience with the unanticipated consequences of military actions, was so eager to portray himself as tough and Vance as weak on this issue. Vance took his position on force during the hostage rescue mission decision precisely because he knew that the mission would not work and would have counterproductive, if not fatal, consequences."¹² And as Vance emphasized in his final appearance before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on March 27, 1980:

No easy formula can determine in advance when we should use military force beyond our alliance areas. The proper response in each case must be a function of the importance and immediacy of the American and allied interests at risk; the source and character of the threat; the potential involvement of friends and allies

¹⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 44.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² The individual interviewed, an interviewee who had first-hand experience with Vance's military expertise and his abilities as a strategist when he was secretary of state, requested anonymity about his criticisms of Brzezinski.

within and beyond the region affected; the prospects for success and the potential costs of our involvement; and other factors.¹³

One of the key aspects of Vance's expertise was that he was not simply a lawyer who had practiced law, but he was also a lawyer who had management experience, an interest in management issues, and a commitment to improving the quality of the bureaucracy and the foreign policymaking process. As Secretary of the Army and as McNamara's number one deputy at the Defense Department, Vance set agency goals and priorities, established the organization of the department, motivated and evaluated staff, and worked within budget limitations. Although Vance actively participated in high-level policy discussions during these years, his positions also required that he focus on what was practical and doable. By the time Vance became secretary of state, he was a seasoned manager with his own management philosophy.

Jimmy Carter's assessment of Vance's management at State -- that Vance was "protective of the State Department and its status and heritage" -- distorted Vance's view of his bureaucratic mission.¹⁴ Although Carter appeared to disparage Vance's commitment to the State Department, Vance's loyalty was appropriate and balanced. Vance clearly demonstrated that he was in the business of revitalizing the State Department, and ensuring that it could carry out its role in the foreign policymaking

¹³ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 509.

¹⁴ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 56.

process. In fact, prior to assuming the role of secretary, Vance emphasized that "the morale and work product level of the Department of State are today in very bad condition."¹⁵ In a memorandum to Carter prior to his election, Vance asserted that the department needed a "complete overhaul to accord with modern conditions," and that its size should be reduced.¹⁶ Furthermore, Vance's belief that the Department of State should have a role of primacy in the foreign policymaking process was not a function of protectiveness. In fact, Vance had emphasized that well before he was offered the post of secretary: "Nothing is more essential than that military instruments be always seen as means of, and not ends of, foreign policy...To the extent possible, therefore, I believe the policy leadership role should be assigned to the Secretary of State."¹⁷ Vance also argued for a strong NSC advisor to the President and a strong National Security Council, but stressed that the success of foreign policymaking cooperation should be "largely dependent upon the quality of the senior officials in the Department of State, and in their ability to operate as a team, both within the Department and in working with other elements of the national security apparatus."¹⁸

¹⁵ Cyrus R. Vance, "Overview of Foreign Policy Issues and Positions," position paper delivered to Jimmy Carter, October 24, 1976, Cyrus R. and Grace Sloane Vance Papers, Yale University Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, 24.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 22-23.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Having emphasized the importance of giving primacy to the Department of State in foreign policymaking, Vance also addressed the need to revitalize the department, to give “it a new and crystallized sense of mandate,” and to hold “it to effective performance.”¹⁹ Then, Vance underlined: “That can only be brought about by a Secretary and Deputy Secretary who are resolved to bring it about – who genuinely see the importance of building up the effectiveness of the institution as an institution.”²⁰ To accomplish this, Vance advocated a mixed organization in the department that would “combine a strong team of line officials, balanced by an analytical staff serving the Secretary and his principal assistants.”²¹ Once Vance became secretary, he also committed himself to modernizing the employment terms, conditions, and culture of the Foreign Service.²² Vance’s management perspective and efforts were thus directed at producing a strong, highly motivated, flexible institution that would be capable of providing the president with high-quality policy analysis and advice.

¹⁹ Ibid., 24.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² David Newsom, “Reflections of a Diplomat. Conversation with Ambassador David D. Newsom, Former Undersecretary of State,” interview by Harry Kreisler, June 13, 2002, *Institute of International Studies*: 2.

Vance's Leadership Principles

Vance rarely expounded upon his leadership principles. Therefore, to identify and analyze his qualities, motivations, and goals, one must probe his public statements, including those provided in his memoirs, in a few interviews, and in personal papers that are declassified, without having the benefit of Vance's personal interpretation and elaboration. In addition, the other logical sources of information about the nature of Vance's leadership, which include the reflections of his colleagues, are so glowing that one cannot help but question their objectivity. Nevertheless, these characterizations of Vance's leadership by his former colleagues, including Lloyd Cutler, Bruce Laingen, Anthony Lake, Robert S. McNamara, David Newsom, Henry Precht, and Harold Saunders, are persuasive. With great emotion, enthusiasm, and detailed recollections, they described him as an individual with exceptional ability and integrity.²³ Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador to America who regularly interacted with Vance, also emphasized that Vance's professionalism was defined by his "integrity," his "fairness and equanimity," and by the fact that "You could depend on his word, which was of no small importance during that complicated period."²⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski disagreed

²³ The author conducted interviews with many of Vance's colleagues, including Lloyd Cutler on May 10, 2002, L. Bruce Laingen on March 26, 2002, Anthony Lake on January 16, 2002, Robert S. McNamara on May 20, 2004, David Newsom on March 12, 2002, Henry Precht on March 8, 2002, and Harold Saunders on January 22, 2002.

²⁴ Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence. Moscow's Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 382,454.

with these superlatives. Although he praised Vance as a decent man who was “patient, cooperative, and clearly a good sport,” he trenchantly criticized his leadership as incompatible with the needs of the post World War II era: “I could not help reflecting on the extent to which Vance seemed to be the quintessential product of his own background: as a member of both the legal profession and the once-dominant WASP elite, he operated according to their values and rules, but those values and rules were of declining relevance not only in terms of domestic American politics but particularly in terms of global conditions.”²⁵

Vance was committed to a fair-play professionalism that focused on achieving priorities without undermining colleagues or bureaucratic adversaries. Vance’s post-resignation comments about Carter’s presidential effectiveness were a prime example of this professionalism. Had Vance wanted to blame an individual for causing him to resign, that individual would have been Carter who decided to authorize a military mission to rescue the American hostages in Iran in opposition to Vance’s advice. And yet, in his memoirs, Vance neither displayed bitterness toward Carter nor attempted to gloat about the wisdom of his advice. Instead, as Vance reviewed the major policy issues of the Carter administration in his memoirs, he was expansive in his praise of many of the president’s decisions and accomplishments. For instance, when Carter

²⁵ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 43.

cancelled the B-1 bomber, Vance deemed the decision "courageous."²⁶ Vance declared Carter's summit invitation to Sadat and Begin "a daring stroke."²⁷ After Carter decided to go to the Middle East in March 1979 rather than rely on ministerial level talks, Vance remarked that the "President's decision was a breathtaking gamble and an act of political courage."²⁸ Furthermore, Vance asserted that "in southern Africa, as in the Middle East, SALT, the Panama Canal Treaties, and other matters, such as human rights, President Carter was determined that we must do what was in our long-term national interest, and not what was politically expedient or good for his ratings in the public opinion polls."²⁹

Vance also applied his rules of fair play to his interactions with Brzezinski, even though Brzezinski did not reciprocate. I.M. Destler suggested that as early as 1977 Vance had recognized that Brzezinski "was not playing by the same rules."³⁰ From a variety of sources, Vance had found out that "Brzezinski had already begun to position himself as the practitioner of Realpolitik in the administration, painting Vance and his

²⁶ Ibid., 57.

²⁷ Ibid., 217.

²⁸ Ibid., 245.

²⁹ Ibid., 257.

³⁰ I.M. Destler and Leslie Gelb, Anthony Lake, *Our Own Worst Enemy: The Unmaking of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 96.

subordinates as left-wingers.”³¹ But Destler emphasized that Vance did not “respond in kind,” nor would he allow his aides to respond for him. Instead, Vance emphasized that he would engage the President on the issues, “but I’m not going to talk to him about Zbig or any bureaucratic nonsense, I’ll talk to him about the issues. That’s the way to do it.”³² Vance’s failures to counter Brzezinski’s challenges to his authority in an aggressive way that included educating the American public about the contentious issues permitted Brzezinski to continue his attempts to augment his power and to undermine Vance’s influence. Hodding Carter III, Vance’s State Department spokesman, emphasized that Vance’s aides begged him to increase his public appearances to ensure that the Congress and the American people understood his position on issues, but that Vance’s distaste for publicity-seeking, his desire to work things out privately with Carter, his commitment and preference to spending time on policy issues, and his travel demands made it very difficult to dominate the public debate on foreign policy issues.³³

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Hodding Carter III, interview by author, March 15, 2006, National Sunshine Week Conference, Washington, D.C.

Vance's Strategic World View

Robert McNamara, for whom Vance worked at the Department of Defense as second in command, described Vance as “one of the finest strategic thinkers I have ever known.”³⁴ Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko observed that Vance “clearly understood the issues more subtly than most,” that he was nuanced in what he said and how he said it, and that sometimes, his views were “original.”³⁵ At the outset of the Carter administration, Vance articulated a world view that he believed was compelling and in the national interest. And yet, Cyrus Vance was underappreciated as a strategic thinker -- a fact that seriously constrained his effectiveness as secretary of state.

Throughout the Carter administration, Carter, Brzezinski, and other White House staff assigned the role of strategic thinker to Brzezinski. Although Carter praised Vance in his memoirs as intelligent, sound, honorable, and diligent, he also denigrated him as a turf-conscious bureaucratic who was not innovative.³⁶ On the other hand, Carter referred to Brzezinski as a “first-rate thinker,”³⁷ who was “astute in his analyses, particularly knowledgeable about broad historical trends affecting the industrialized nations, and a firm believer in a strong defense for our country and in the enhancement

³⁴ Robert S. McNamara, interview by author, May 20, 2004.

³⁵ Andrei Gromyko, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 295.

³⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 56.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

of freedom and democratic principles both here and abroad. His proposals were innovative and often provocative, and I agreed with them – most of the time."³⁸ Carter further noted that Brzezinski and his staff were "particularly adept at incisive analyses of strategic concepts, and were prolific in the production of new ideas."³⁹

Brzezinski likewise painted Vance as a talented individual, "a skillful negotiator, probably a very good manager, with a broad range of experience," but also suggested that Vance "probably was not enough of a conceptualizer – though the President could compensate for that."⁴⁰ Brzezinski further declared that although he admired Vance's "dedication, the long hours he was putting in, and his readiness to fulfill any Presidential requirement," he was weaker than himself on "longer-range perspective."⁴¹ Criticizing Vance for not providing "a broad conceptual explanation for what our Administration was trying to do," and noting that Carter's lack of preparation inhibited him from undertaking the task, Brzezinski stated that he felt compelled to fill this role and did not resist doing so.⁴²

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 11

⁴¹ Ibid., 37.

⁴² Ibid.

How did the characterization of Brzezinski as the strategic thinker in the administration take root and become accepted? First, Carter, as inexperienced as he was in foreign affairs and possibly insecure in his analytical abilities in this area, was more impressed with how Brzezinski expressed himself than with Vance's simpler-sounding articulation of the issues. George Ball, for example, suggested that Brzezinski "possessed the same facility as Walt Rostow for inventing abstractions that sounded deceptively global and profound – at least to Presidents not inoculated by early exposure to the practice...a flair for making little fishes talk like whales."⁴³ Vance, on the other hand, spoke a clear, simple, common-sense language that took the form of broad statements of themes. Furthermore, Brzezinski worked very hard and successfully to cast Vance in an inferior intellectual light to accentuate his own standing with Carter, and Carter appeared to accept Brzezinski's characterizations. One observer pointed out what he described as an irony: "Sure, Brzezinski was a strategic thinker. But he was frequently wrong! Vance's strategies have withstood the test of time."⁴⁴

The perception of Vance as the lawyer and Brzezinski as the strategist also took hold in part because Vance allowed it to take hold. Vance's reluctance to engage in

⁴³ George Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern* (New York: Norton, 1982), 458.

⁴⁴ The public official quoted had an in-depth familiarity with Vance's and Brzezinski's work. He agreed to be interviewed and quoted on other subjects, however, on the condition that he would not be quoted on this subject.

image-enhancing measures, his preference “to work without much ostentation,”⁴⁵ and his distaste for bureaucratic in-fighting dissuaded him from spending his time on touting his analytical strengths. Vance believed his strengths were obvious. Vance's colleagues and supporters, however, did not believe that they were obvious. They criticized Vance for not being more vocal and more dominant in public, for not recognizing that Brzezinski was actively depreciating his power over time, and for not insisting that Brzezinski stop usurping his role as chief policy spokesman. For example, in a *New York Times Magazine* feature about Vance in the spring of 1979, Bernard Gwertzman pointed out:

Washington observers accustomed to sizing up people in terms of jockeying for position and the bureaucratic ploy have found Cyrus Vance difficult to fathom. He has never been known to sanction a leak for political gain. He passes up opportunities to plug the Administration's policies. When public television geared up for live coverage of Senate hearings on the new China policy – a splendid chance to court wider public understanding of the controversial decision to recognize Peking and sever official ties with Taiwan, he let the Deputy Secretary of State Warren M. Christopher do the talking.⁴⁶

Leslie Gelb concurred: "Vance helped to defeat himself by not taking his case relentlessly to the American people."⁴⁷ Likewise James Reston wrote a perceptive article about the impressive, strategic world view articulated by the supposedly non

⁴⁵ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 382.

⁴⁶ Bernard Gwertzman, "Cyrus Vance Plays It Cool," *The New York Times Magazine*, May 18, 1979, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Gelb, "The Vance Legacy," H4190.

strategic secretary of state after Vance gave a foreign policy address in May 1979. Reston observed that the common view was that Vance "may not have any great conception of strategy for American foreign policy," but then contradicted this statement by highlighting the nuanced foreign policy strategies Vance addressed in the speech, including Vance's assessment of stable strategic equivalency, the growing risks of regional conflicts, and the appropriate responses to the economic, social, and political changes in the Third World. Reston lamented: "it's too bad that this Chicago speech was not given more attention."⁴⁸

At the heart of Vance's world view was his belief that "our national interests encompassed more than U.S.-Soviet relations," and that many "developments did not fit neatly into an East-West context."⁴⁹ Prior to accepting the position of secretary of state, Vance articulated for Carter four categories of foreign policy principles – a strategic world view framework that he believed Carter embraced.⁵⁰

The first point in Vance's framework related more to process than substance. Asserting that "foreign policy should be understood and supported by the American people and the Congress," Vance emphasized that Congress needed to be "an active

⁴⁸ James Reston, "Vance's Quiet Voice," *New York Times*, May 4, 1979, sec. A, p. 33.

⁴⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 27.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

partner in developing foreign policy objectives."⁵¹ To meet this goal, Vance proposed that the administration keep Congress informed about critical issues and that the information be accurate and candid. Although this may sound straightforward and commonsensical, previous administrations encountered numerous problems by not making consistent, open communications with Congress a high priority.

The second element of Vance's foreign policy strategy was the analytical cornerstone: the necessity of developing a new framework for managing East-West relationships, particularly the relationship with the Soviet Union. Essentially, Vance believed that although the Soviet Union was a powerful adversary, it also had powerful incentives to avoid military conflicts with the United States. Vance proposed that the Soviet Union did not have a master plan for dominating the world, but instead sought to probe for weaknesses and ways of advancing its goals. Flowing from these perceptions about the Soviet Union was Vance's conviction that the Carter administration needed to convey to the American people the following implications of Soviet goals and behavior:

1. The scope and prospects for cooperation were modest. The Soviet Union would continue to try to expand its influence when possible. Competition was, and would continue to be, the principal feature of the relationship. Our task was to regulate it.

⁵¹ Ibid., 27-28.

2. Patience and persistence in the pursuit of American long-term objectives were essential, and we should strive to reduce the swings in mood and attitude that had made a consistent policy difficult in the past.
3. We had to remain militarily strong and determined in the defense of our vital interests and our values without being bellicose. And we had to be firm and resolute, but pragmatic, in identifying the American interests so vital that they would justify recourse to military force.
4. There existed areas, especially in nuclear arms control, where cooperation with the Soviet Union was possible because our interests coincided with theirs. When cooperation could enhance our security, as in limiting the nuclear arms race, it should be pursued without attempting to link it to other issues.⁵²

The third component of Vance's strategy focused on the importance of understanding the changes in global political, economic, and social conditions, particularly among Third World nations. Vance asserted that a failure to address problems associated with "human rights, economic development, energy, population growth, environmental damage, food, nuclear proliferation, and arms transfers," would not only exacerbate current suffering in Third World countries, but also possibly lead to "uncontrollable conflicts that could draw the nuclear powers into potentially disastrous military action."⁵³ Vance emphasized the value of gaining an in-depth understanding of these issues, on a country-by-country basis, without necessarily fitting these issues into East-West policy.

⁵² Ibid., 28.

⁵³ Ibid.

Vance's final strategic point entailed the United States harnessing "the basic values of the Founding Fathers to our foreign policy" and acknowledging "the growing demands of individuals around the world for the fulfillment of their rights."⁵⁴ Vance shared Carter's commitment to human rights, but qualified that "we had to be flexible and pragmatic in dealing with specific cases that might affect our national security."⁵⁵ As Vance stressed: "In pursuing a human rights policy, we must always keep in mind the limits of our power and of our wisdom. A sure formula for defeat of our goals would be a rigid, hubristic attempt to impose our values on others... We must be realistic. Our country can only achieve our objectives if we shape what we do to the case at hand."⁵⁶

The nature of Cyrus Vance's leadership was, therefore, grounded in his substantial legal, foreign policy, and management experience, marked by a professionalism committed to bureaucratic fair-play, and enhanced by an ability to think strategically about foreign policy issues. In spite of all of Vance's strengths, his failure to project himself as a strategic leader would ultimately undermine his effectiveness as secretary of state.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 33.

⁵⁶ Cyrus Vance, *The Pursuit of Human Rights. Address by the Secretary of State before the Georgia Law School* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, April 30, 1977).

CHAPTER 2. THE FOREIGN POLICY LEADERSHIP OF JIMMY CARTER

During their campaigns for office and the launching of their administrations, U.S. presidents attempt to define the nature of their leadership, including the themes that will motivate their work, their understanding of “what needs to be done,” and how they intend to exercise and organize their power to achieve their priorities.¹ When Cyrus Vance agreed to be Jimmy Carter’s secretary of state, he believed that Carter and he “agreed on the shape and direction of our foreign policy,”² and wanted to launch the country “on a bold new course.”³ Carter appeared to have two leadership goals: first, to provide transformational leadership; and second, to be clearly in charge of the foreign policymaking process. Vance did not believe that Carter’s goals undermined either his desired policies or influence. Instead, as Vance accepted Carter’s offer to be secretary of state, he was pleased that Carter appeared to have firm principles, and felt confident that “he could be a leader in foreign policy, and that I could function effectively as his

¹ Peter Drucker, management “writer, thinker, and lecturer,” has stated that figuring out “what needs to be done” is the first half of the definition of leadership. The second part is: “Of those things that would make a difference, which are right for me?” Rich Karlgaard, “Peter Drucker on Leadership,” *Forbes.com*, November 19, 2004, http://www.forbes.com/2004/11/19/cz_rk_1119drucker/.

² Vance, *Hard Choices*, 33.

³ *Ibid.*, 44.

chief lieutenant.”⁴ Nevertheless, some of the themes of Carter’s transformational leadership and certain characteristics of his hands-on management constrained Vance’s ability to be an effective secretary of state.

Carter’s Goal of Transformational Leadership

During his first presidential campaign, Jimmy Carter demonstrated that he had a keen appreciation of the importance of providing a compelling, inspirational statement of the nature of his leadership. Not only did he seek to contrast his leadership messages with that of the previous Republican administrations, but he tried to convince the American people that his politics were different, that he offered them something new and positive. As Carter launched his first presidential campaign in 1974, he emphasized that the American people deserved an honest and competent government, and that he could make this happen through “bold and inspired leadership.”⁵ The observation of management analysts that “Leadership always has been a key differentiator between successful and unsuccessful organizations”⁶ was a clear underpinning of Carter’s message. In many respects, Carter’s best-selling campaign book, *Why Not the Best?*,

⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁵ Jimmy Carter, *Why Not the Best?* (New York: Bantam, 1976), 6.

⁶ "Harvard Business School Home Page for Educational Programs," <http://www.exed.hbs.edu/programs/lbp/>.

was a paean to the critical importance of effective leadership – especially the type of leadership exhibited by Carter’s mentor, Navy Admiral Hyman Rickover, as well as the type of leadership embraced by Carter himself as governor of Georgia.

Although Carter committed himself in his early speeches and writings to reforming the federal government, he further emphasized that he intended to inspire individuals. Carter’s desire to uplift the American people was no pipe dream – it reflected his recognition that presidential power is multi-dimensional, expansive, and personal, and that to be effective, a president must inspire people. As Robert Coles has observed: “Presidents, by word and deed, take us in certain directions, influence our assumptions, our expectations or worries.”⁷ Presidents and other senior officials have the capacity “to exert a certain kind of leadership – moral leadership” and in so doing, “get something good done.”⁸ Political scientist expert James MacGregor Burns has likewise documented that effective leadership involves the ability to focus on and instill purpose. Defining effective leadership as transforming leadership, Burns clarifies that transforming leadership occurs when “one or more persons *engage* with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality...transforming leadership ultimately becomes *moral* in that it raises the level

⁷ Robert Coles, *Lives of Moral Leadership* (New York: Random House, 2000), 243.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both the leader and the led, and thus has a transforming effect on both."⁹

Throughout his presidential campaign, Jimmy Carter revealed that he aspired to be a transforming, moral, and ethical president. Not only did Carter pledge to move the country beyond the “tragedies of Cambodia and Vietnam -- the shock, embarrassment and shame of Watergate -- the doubt and confusion surrounding the economic woes,”¹⁰ but he also promised to be a president “who feels your pain and shares your dreams and takes his strength and his wisdom and his courage from you.”¹¹ In accepting the Democratic Party's nomination for president in the summer of 1976, Carter stressed that his leadership would help "America to move and to speak not with boasting and belligerence but with a quiet strength ...to govern at home not by confusion and crisis but with grace and imagination and sense.”¹² In addition, Carter expressed his commitment to human rights, to "shape an international framework of peace within

⁹ James MacGregor Burns, quoted in: Thomas J. Peters, Jr. and Robert H. Waterman, *In Search of Excellence* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 82-83.

¹⁰ Carter, *Why Not the Best?*, 3.

¹¹ Jimmy Carter, "Jimmy Carter Acceptance Speech. Our Nation's Past and Future, July 15, 1976," *Jimmy Carter Library*, http://jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/speeches/acceptance_speech.pdf.

¹² Ibid.

which our own ideals gradually can become a global reality."¹³ Having criticized the divided and deadlocked nature of government during the campaign, Carter pledged in his inaugural address to "learn together and laugh together and work together and pray together," and to maintain "a quiet strength based not merely on the size of an arsenal, but on the nobility of ideas."¹⁴ Carter was indeed issuing a call for international, domestic, and personal transformation.

The specific leadership themes that Carter expressed in campaign speeches, inaugural addresses, and policy statements were on one level simply political, motivational, or even comforting rhetoric. On another level, however, they constituted the core mission of his presidential policies, and thereby shaped the development and execution of foreign and domestic policies. Thus, Carter's leadership themes not only helped him get elected, but they also formed the foundation of his presidential leadership.

When one explores the themes inherent in Carter's transformational leadership in more detail, one finds that he consistently communicated a four-part leadership message: first, the American people are good; second, the federal government is

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Jimmy Carter, "Inaugural Address of President Jimmy Carter, January 20, 1977," *Jimmy Carter Library*, <http://jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/speeches/inaugadd.phtml/>.

fundamentally flawed; third, I, an untainted outsider, share in the virtue of the American people; and fourth, I am committed to and will fulfill many noble goals.

Jimmy Carter, as campaigner and as president, “made a political art form of the goodness theme, filling his days with compliments of the voters’ yearning for decency.”¹⁵ In announcing his candidacy for the presidency in December 1974, Carter charged that “Our political leaders have simply underestimated the innate quality of our people”¹⁶-- an innate quality that Carter defined as “inherently unselfish, open, honest, decent, competent, and compassionate.”¹⁷ Carter repeated this goodness theme throughout his presidency, but occasionally qualified its meaning in response to questions about it. For example, when questioned in mid 1977 about whether his views were consistent with Reinhold Niebuhr's observation that “The sad duty of politics is to establish justice in a sinful world,”¹⁸ Carter modified his previous assertions about the

¹⁵ Francis X. Clines, “Candidates Also Appeal to those Basic Virtues,” *The New York Times*, October 25, 1980, sec. E, p. 2.

¹⁶ Jimmy Carter, “Carter for President Announcement Speech. Address by Jimmy Carter Announcing his Candidacy for the 1976 Democratic Presidential Nomination to the National Press Club,” *4president.org*, <http://www.4president.org/speeches/carter1974.announcement.htm>.

¹⁷ Carter, *Why Not the Best?*, 141.

¹⁸ Carter began *Why Not the Best?* with three quotations: one by Dylan Thomas, one by Bob Dylan, and this quotation by Niebuhr. Carter, *Why Not the Best?*, Quotation Page.

goodness of the people by suggesting that there was a need to have a government "as good as they (the American people) are or would like to be."¹⁹

Juxtaposed to Carter's definition of the American people's goodness was his critique of the federal government as "the complicated and confused and overlapping and wasteful federal government bureaucracy."²⁰ Carter stressed that "for too long political leaders have been isolated from the people. They have made decisions from an ivory tower."²¹ Focusing on the "lack of competence and integrity" in the federal government, Carter additionally asserted: "The root of the problem is not so much that our people have lost confidence in government, but that government has demonstrated time and again its lack of confidence in the people."²² Sometimes Carter would reference "selfish bureaucrats" and "hidebound elected officials" as the problem; other times he would suggest that "Professional government workers are competent and dedicated," but were prevented from doing quality work by a "confused and complicated bureaucracy."²³ When Carter attacked "Washington," however, he rarely

¹⁹ Jimmy Carter, "A Conversation with Jimmy Carter. Interview by Harvey Shapiro," *The New York Times*, June 19, 1977, Book Review, p. 36.

²⁰ Carter, "Acceptance Speech. Our Nation's Past and Future."

²¹ Carter, "Carter for President Announcement Speech."

²² Carter, "Acceptance Speech. Our Nation's Past and Future."

²³ Carter, *Why Not the Best?*, 171.

distinguished the people, from the process, from the apparatus of government. His thematic solution to the key problem of a flawed government was "it is time for the people to run the government and not the other way around."²⁴ In the specific case of the Department of State, even though Carter acknowledged that it was staffed by "highly qualified professional men and women," he also contended that it lacked innovation and was overly protective of its heritage and status.²⁵

Another key component of Carter's central message was that not only had he not been part of the "divided deadlocked government," a government "without new ideas, without youth or vitality, without vision, and without the confidence of the American people," but he was also one of the people – "a President who's not isolated from the people."²⁶ Carter described himself as a man with remarkable breadth and depth of experience. Identifying himself as farmer, he added that, for "those who might have an aversion to farmers," he could also "claim with credentials to be an engineer, a planner, a nuclear physicist, a businessman, and a professional naval officer."²⁷ Moreover, he positioned himself as distinct from other influential politicians because he hailed from a town of 800 people, had never held national office, did not have the support of the

²⁴ Carter, "Acceptance Speech. Our Nation's Past and Future."

²⁵ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 55-56.

²⁶ Carter, "Acceptance Speech. Our Nation's Past and Future."

²⁷ Carter, *Why Not the Best*, 159.

national news media, and did not have access to monies raised before a new campaign financing law took effect. The capstone of Carter's self-description was that, unlike existing national politicians, Carter proclaimed himself to be completely honest: "I don't know how to compromise on any principle I believe is right."²⁸ In short, if the people were good and if the government was fundamentally flawed, only Carter – a man of virtue and extraordinary competence and experience – would be a change agent because he was one of the people. Jimmy Carter thus presented his leadership and himself as exceptional.

A final, overriding theme that shaped many of Carter's foreign policy messages was that he committed his administration to addressing many noble goals – goals that reflected the highest principles, goals that were grounded in "moral integrity," and goals that would allow the nation "to be a beacon for nations who search for peace and who search for freedom, who search for individual liberty, who search for basic human rights."²⁹ Carter emphasized that the specific foreign policy goals that flowed from these high principles resulted from:

inventorying the country's problems and determining what should be done about as many of them as possible...Peace, human rights, nuclear arms control, and the Middle East had been my major foreign policy concerns...achieving maximum bureaucratic efficiency, reorganizing the government, creating jobs, deregulating

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "The Second Carter-Ford Presidential Debate, October 6, 1976," *Commission on Presidential Debates*, <http://www.debates.org/pages/trans76b.html>.

major industries, addressing the energy problem, canceling wasteful water projects, welfare and tax reform, environmental quality, restoring the moral fiber of the government, and openness and honesty in dealing with the press and public.³⁰

Carter thus championed a long list of foreign and domestic policy goals. He wanted to do it all, and asked: “Is the achievement of these and other goals beyond the capacity of our American government?” His answer was: “I think not...There must be no lowering of these standards, no acceptance of mediocrity in any aspect of our private or public lives.”³¹

How could anyone criticize or disagree with Carter’s noble aspirations? How could these themes pose serious difficulties for his secretary of state? In fact, Jimmy Carter’s presidential themes contradicted basic elements of Cyrus Vance’s philosophy of government. Cyrus Vance did not believe that the federal government was fundamentally flawed, or that being a Washington outsider was necessarily preferable to having federal government experience. While Vance was committed to noble goals, he focused on setting a few attainable priorities. Furthermore, Carter’s leadership rhetoric, especially his propensity to express themes as absolutes and ultimates, frequently undermined and complicated Vance’s ability to provide clear, understandable, and accurate statements of U.S. foreign policy.

³⁰ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 70.

³¹ Carter, *Why Not the Best?*, 178-179.

Carter's Hands-on Foreign Policy Management

Four characteristics of Carter's leadership behavior posed significant problems for Vance: first, Carter's belief that since his inexperience in foreign affairs, to the degree it existed, did not matter, he would essentially act as his own secretary of state; second, Carter's particularistic focus, his detailed way of managing and analyzing that allowed him to master complex facts and issues, but also impeded the development and implementation of coherent foreign policies; third, Carter's determination to manage via collegial competition, a management behavior that reflected his desire for information and control instead of a willingness and ability to delegate authority to achieve well-defined strategic goals; and finally, Carter's commitment to provide moral leadership, a pledge that Carter both fulfilled on occasion and violated on occasion, but violated particularly and fundamentally in his relationship with Vance.

While campaigning for the presidency and after assuming office, Jimmy Carter projected a high degree of confidence about his ability to provide effective foreign policy leadership. Carter suggested that his knowledge of foreign affairs acquired from traveling in the Navy, from international trips as Georgia governor, from extensive reading, and from advisor briefings gave him a strong, substantive foundation for

superb foreign policy leadership.³² Carter also maintained that in-depth foreign policy experience not only did not matter, but that inexperience offered advantages of a fresh perspective, especially when strengthened by intensive study and good instincts. In fact, Carter's campaign literature asserted that Carter was capable of doing and being the best at anything he attempted. These materials stressed that after Admiral Hyman Rickover chastised him for not doing his best at the Naval Academy, "...in every task he's undertaken since then, Jimmy has given nothing less."³³ The presidential performance of Harry Truman, which Carter frequently cited, provided some justification for Carter's view that, in spite of his relative inexperience, he could be a superb president. After all, Truman, who shared Carter's humble roots and inexperience with foreign policy, effectively presided over the creation and implementation of a sea change in American foreign policy, including the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the North Atlantic Treaty.³⁴ As Carter emphasized:

Of all the Presidents who had served during my lifetime, I admired Harry Truman most, and had studied his career more than any other. He was direct and honest, somewhat old-fashioned in his attitudes, bound close to his small hometown

³² Ibid., Chapters 9, 13-16.

³³ "Jimmy Carter for President 1976 Campaign Brochure," <http://www.4president.org/brochures/Carter1976brochure.htm>.

³⁴ Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman and the Modern American Presidency* (New York: Harper Collins, 1983), 65.

roots, courageous in facing serious challenges, and willing to be unpopular if he believed his actions were best for the country.³⁵

Carter also suggested that mastering foreign policy was not a particularly difficult task. In response to an interview question about his focus on foreign policy during his first year in office, Carter answered that the reason the media covered foreign policy more than domestic policy was that “it is much easier to talk or write about the generalities of foreign policy than to deal with the complex facts and figures of a new farm program.”³⁶ Furthermore, although Carter occasionally acknowledged his relative foreign policy inexperience, he also stressed that he was experienced enough and knew how to access the information he needed. In addition, he suggested that he had been an exceptional governor and that this experience was transferable to the presidency: “I was experienced as Governor. I think I did a good job as Governor. I did a lot of innovative things, all of which have stood the test of time.”³⁷ As Georgia governor, Carter emphasized that he had “proper” relationships with “foreign governments and peoples in spite of the natural limitations of an individual state to conduct foreign affairs,” and that he had made ten official and personal visits to other nations as part of

³⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 70.

³⁶ James Reston, "Interview with President Carter," *The New York Times*, December 5, 1977, p. 45.

³⁷ Jimmy Carter, "Carter Presidency Project. Interview with Jimmy Carter, November 29, 1982," *Miller Center Presidential Oral History Program*, <http://www.millercenter.virginia.edu>.

his duties.³⁸ From these visits, Carter stressed that he had gained an understanding of “international matters of great interest to our own people.”³⁹ To ensure that he had “continuing opportunity for penetrating analyses of complicated, important, and timely foreign policy questions,” Carter had engaged in the work of the Trilateral Commission where “many of the other members have helped me in my study of foreign affairs.”⁴⁰ And finally, as Carter noted during the last 1976 presidential debate, “We have a very, very wide-ranging group of advisors who help me prepare for these debates and who teach me about international economics, and foreign affairs, defense matters, health, education, welfare, government reorganization. I’d say several hundred of them. And they’re very fine and very highly qualified.”⁴¹ Carter thus forcefully stressed that he – and only he – had just the right blending of inexperience, experience, and capabilities to exercise foreign policy leadership. As he noted in the second Carter-Ford presidential debate, effective foreign policy leadership does not require a resume with substantial foreign policy experience:

³⁸ Carter, *Why Not the Best*, 141.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 162,163.

⁴¹ Jimmy Carter, "Third Carter-Ford Presidential Debate, October 22, 1976," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/show/debate/php?debateid=8/>.

Nobody has that except a president who has served a long time or a secretary of state. But my background, my experience, my knowledge of the people of this country, my commitment to our principles that don't change – those are the best bases to correct the horrible mistakes of this administration and restore our own country to a position of leadership in the world."⁴²

Two of Carter's strengths were his willingness to put in the time to learn the substance of foreign policy issues and his tremendous capacity to absorb complex materials. Carter's supportive aides and detractors agreed: no one mastered detailed, complicated material better than Jimmy Carter. Zbigniew Brzezinski suggested that "His memory was phenomenal, his reading voracious, and his thirst for more knowledge unquenchable."⁴³ As Carter aide Jack Watson observed, "The President... was very much someone who wanted to be in charge himself, and who had such an extraordinary capacity for work, he could absorb and deal with enormous amounts of information. The truth is, he had the greatest capacity for sustained work I have ever observed."⁴⁴ NSC staffer William Odom concurred: "His ability to get through written material was awe-inspiring. You would find his margin notes on the last page of lengthy memos. He'd correct your English or your spelling. He obviously read with

⁴² Jimmy Carter, "Second Carter-Ford Presidential Debate, October 6, 1976," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showdebate.php?debateid=7/>.

⁴³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 22.

⁴⁴ Jack Watson, "Carter Presidency Project. Interview with Jack H. Watson, Jr., April 17, 1981," *The Miller Center*.

enormous comprehension almost anything you put to him."⁴⁵ Madeleine Albright, also a NSC staffer, further suggested that Carter "always knew the facts and enjoyed displaying them in these evening foreign policy groupings. He did not like to be outdone by either Brzezinski or Vance or Brown, especially when it was on issues such as SALT, which he felt that he really did know."⁴⁶

Carter colleagues, contemporary observers, and historians have observed that while Carter's "command of factual information" was a tremendous asset in some circumstances, and "was decisive in the Middle East peace process,"⁴⁷ it nevertheless constrained Carter from developing and articulating a coherent vision of what he wanted to accomplish and from focusing on "the agenda items that would most benefit from his close examination."⁴⁸ Hamilton Jordan argued that Carter had vision, but "no unifying political philosophy. To the extent it was possible to attach a label to the amalgam of his beliefs, that tag would be 'moderate.' His approach was

⁴⁵ William Odom, "Carter Presidency Project. Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, Madeleine K. Albright, Leslie G. Denend, William Odom, February 18, 1982," *The Miller Center*, <http://www.millercenter.virginia.edu/index.php/scripps/digitalarchive/>.

⁴⁶ Ibid., "Interview with Madeleine Albright."

⁴⁷ Strong, *Working in the World*, 265.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

nonideological, ad hoc.”⁴⁹ Raymond L. Garthoff praised Carter’s “quick intelligence and readiness to learn the facts,” but emphasized that “his naïveté in both bureaucratic and global politics led to much vacillation and a checkered path for his ambitious and well intended, but fragmented and inconsistent foreign policy.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, excessive attention to detail resulted in Carter being submerged by what historian Thomas Bailey has referred to as the “tyranny of the trivial.”⁵¹ After Carter speechwriter James Fallows left the administration, he emphasized in a critical 1979 article:

I came to think that Carter believes fifty things, but no one thing. He holds explicit, thorough positions on every issue under the sun, but he has no large view of the relations between them....Carter thinks in lists, not arguments; as long as items are there, their order does not matter, nor does the hierarchy among them. Whenever he gave us an outline for a speech, it would consist of six or seven subjects (‘inflation,’ ‘need to fight waste’) rather than a theme or tone.⁵²

Carter aide Jack Watson acknowledged the problem associated with “having a laundry list or checklist rather than a clearer sense of philosophical and political priorities:”...

⁴⁹ Hamilton Jordan, "How Carter Lost the 1980 Election," *Newsweek*, October 4, 1982, 48.

⁵⁰ Raymond L. Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation. American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1994), 623.

⁵¹ Hugh Sidey, "Assessing a Presidency," *Time*, August 18, 1980, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/printout/0,8816,948928.00html>.

⁵² James Fallows, "The Passionless President," *The Atlantic*, May, 1979, 11.

We clearly did have a problem in that the President wanted to do so much so fast. There were so many things that he wanted to confront, and did: service reform, the Panama Canal Treaties, the 1977 economic stimulus program, which was designed to increase employment, or government reorganization. We had too many things on our agenda for our own good.⁵³

Ultimately, Carter's focus on the particular, coupled with a lack of his own coherent vision, was a significant root of Vance's struggles as secretary of state for an important reason: it led Carter to design a foreign policymaking apparatus that was consistent with his desire to promote collegial competition and to control the decisionmaking process, but also undermined Vance's ability to hold Carter to the foreign policy agenda that Vance believed they had agreed to in December of 1976. Furthermore, as former Carter aides in the State Department suggested:

Carter's determination to make detailed decisions himself without reference to any overarching strategy – and his willingness to remake and remake them – meant that no single subordinate would have his constant backing. This too gave advantage to the aide who would personally staff out these decisions.⁵⁴

The staffer with the greatest formal control over the foreign policymaking process and the greatest informal access to Carter was Zbigniew Brzezinski, who aggressively lobbied Carter to adopt his world view and not that of Cyrus Vance. Cautioning against overstating that Carter's focus on the particular resulted in him never seeing the forest

⁵³ Jack Watson, "The Carter Presidency Project. Interview with Jack H. Watson, Jr., April, 17, 1981," *The Miller Center*.

⁵⁴ Gelb, Destler, and Lake, *Our Own Worst Enemy*, 219.

for the trees, Robert Strong proposed that Carter's "greatest failing" was "his inability during his administration to decide whose forest he was in – Vance's or Brzezinski's."⁵⁵

The nature of Carter's foreign policy leadership not only required that Carter would act as the clear decision maker, but also that he would utilize a team of highly competent advisors who would "be quite free in their counsel to me."⁵⁶ Carter's view of how he would structure and exercise his foreign policy leadership was similar to a spokes-of-the-wheel leadership model, with his cabinet officials and other key advisors acting as the spokes of the wheel, and Carter acting as the information gatherer, ultimate analyst, and decider in the center. This leadership model was consistent with Carter's perceived need for and ability to absorb extensive information, as well as his confidence that he could formulate and articulate policy after considering all relevant counsel.

Carter maintained that collegiality would produce the quality he was seeking, as long as his cabinet officials and staff saw themselves as "friends and equals, sure enough of themselves that they would not feel compelled to squabble about who should take the lead on any particular issue."⁵⁷ In Carter's collegial approach, there was to be no "morbid backbiting and struggling over real or imagined bureaucratic

⁵⁵ Strong, *Working in the World*, 265.

⁵⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 63.

⁵⁷ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 35.

prerogatives.”⁵⁸ In addition, Carter qualified that collegiality required loyalty, and that once he had reached a decision, he expected his advisors to support him, even if they “had strongly advised a different course of action.”⁵⁹

Carter clearly believed that a competitive process “would produce wide-ranging policy options, the best of which would prevail on the strength of their merits,”⁶⁰ and would enhance his presidential power and control because he would be “the only player in a position to resolve disputes between his chief advisors.”⁶¹ Throughout his administration, Carter maintained his enthusiasm for the two key elements of his competitive, collegial approach: first, that he was the controller and the locus of foreign policymaking power; and second, that he would “tap the strongest elements” in the NSC staff and the Department of State “as changing circumstances demanded.”⁶²

The nature of Carter’s foreign policy leadership, including his reliance on collegial competition, formed the foundation for Vance’s struggles as secretary of state and his ultimate resignation. Carter created and maintained an important three-part

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 63.

⁶⁰ Stephen Hess, *Organizing the Presidency* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002), 124.

⁶¹ Ibid., 142.

⁶² Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 55.

fiction. First, he consistently affirmed that Vance was the administration's chief foreign policy spokesman, but then allowed and encouraged Brzezinski to articulate policies or interpretations of policies that undercut the consistent messages that Vance sought to convey. Second, Carter established a foreign policymaking apparatus, which Carter proclaimed to be collegial, but was structurally and procedurally inconsistent with Carter's pledge of Vance's foreign policy primacy. Finally, Carter emphasized on numerous occasions that "There have been no basic disagreements with foreign policy between Vance and me or between Vance and Brzezinski."⁶³ In fact, the road to Vance's resignation was paved with those disagreements, with the dispute about the hostage rescue mission providing the final impetus.

⁶³ "Jimmy Carter. "Remarks and a Question and Answer Session at Temple University, May 9, 1980," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print/php?pid=33394/>.

CHAPTER 3. THE FOREIGN POLICYMAKING APPARATUS OF THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION

On Inauguration Day, January 20, 1977, President Jimmy Carter instituted a foreign policymaking apparatus that reflected his leadership themes. This apparatus included Carter's formal assignments of specific powers to key foreign policymaking officials, specifications of how issues would be analyzed, both formally and informally, and determinations of how decisions would be made and implemented. The apparatus Carter announced on Inauguration Day produced the administration's foreign policies, including Carter's decisions regarding strategic arms control, the normalization of relations with China, and the military action to rescue the hostages in Iran. It also created the foundation for Cyrus Vance's battle for principle and power as secretary of state.

The importance of structure, process, and people to the effectiveness of any organization is a dominant theme in management, leadership, and political science literature, and is occasionally addressed in historical literature. Not only have the linkages among leadership, structure, process, strategy, and outcomes been focal points of numerous managerial and political science studies, but the practitioners of management theory, that is those individuals who lead public and private sector organizations, often explicitly ask the questions: does our organizational structure reflect our mission; does our planning process produce the analyses and strategies we

need to be effective; and do we have the people with the best skills and commitment to implement our strategies? On the corporate side, Alfred D. Chandler has documented extensively that structure has “had as much impact on strategy as strategy had on structure.”¹ Two examples of intensive appraisals of the impact of structure and process on a public sector or governmental organization are David Rothkopf’s examination of the relative influence of the National Security Council (NSC) on foreign policymaking since the NSC’s inception in 1947,² and John Prados’s history of how the NSC advisor has risen to a place of preeminent stature in the U.S. system of government.³ Both studies argue that the intersection of presidential leadership with the nature of the foreign policymaking apparatus has strongly affected policy outcomes and other decisions.

¹ Alfred D. Chandler, "Corporate Strategy and Structure: Some Current Considerations," *Society*, Research Library Core, 2, 35 (January/February 1998): 348.

² Rothkopf’s overview generally discusses the relationship between structure and policy. His complete study documents this relationship. See David Rothkopf, *Running the World. The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 6.

³ Prados emphasizes the tremendous potential impact of the NSC, the value of a president having someone devoted to asking “the giraffe questions,” and having a policy system that works effectively. Given the potential effects of the NSC on policy, he questions whether or not the status of the NSC and its advisor should be clarified by legislation that provides greater oversight. John Prados, *Keepers of the Keys. A History of the National Security Council from Truman to Bush* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 565-569.

In his campaign for the presidency, Jimmy Carter asserted that a disciplined, responsive bureaucratic structure and process were the underpinnings of effective government. Several chapters of Carter's *Why not the Best?* lauded his accomplishments as governor of Georgia, including his organizational reforms, the implementation of zero-based budgeting, financial systems reform, and the achievement of major state goals with fewer resources.⁴ Thus, Carter began his administration, not only with keen appreciation of the importance of structure and process and the need to select exceptional people for leadership positions, but also with a belief that his experience gave him special insight into what would help him – in an organizational sense – to master, control, and resolve foreign policy issues. Carter decided to create a collegial foreign policymaking system, a particular type of spokes-of-the-wheel structure, that he believed would maximize his control, assure his access to information, and enhance his ability to produce coherent, effective policies.

Carter's policymaking process also appeared to reflect either his inability to (or desire not to) clarify the appropriate roles of his secretary of state and NSC advisor. Although most presidents have stated that their secretaries of state would be their primary foreign policy advisor, presidents' actual reliance on their secretaries of state has varied greatly. Despite Carter's assurances that his secretary of state would be his

⁴ See Carter, *Why Not the Best?*, Chapters 9-12, for Carter's descriptions of his organizational and structural achievements as governor of Georgia.

preeminent foreign policy spokesman and advisor, he implemented a policymaking system that frequently undermined Vance's authority and tilted the power in the system to his national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Historical Roles of the Department of State and the National Security Council

In important respects, the roles of the U.S. Department of State and the National Security Council, as well as the roles of the secretary and NSC advisor, have sprung from the same roots: the desire of U.S. presidents to control foreign policy making. Dean Acheson, who served as President Truman's third secretary of state from 1949 to 1953, argued that the president's dominant foreign policy role was confirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court in its Curtiss-Wright decision: "The President is the constitutional representative of the United States with regard to foreign nations. He manages our concerns with foreign nations and must necessarily be most competent to determine when, who, and upon what subjects negotiation may be urged with the greatest prospect of success."⁵ The State Department and the National Security Council are the institutional manifestations of the president's foreign affairs responsibilities – responsibilities that have required a high degree of analytical work, an ability to respond effectively to international crises, the capability to negotiate, and the ability to draw on

⁵ Dean Acheson, "The Eclipse of the State Department," *Foreign Affairs* 49, no. 4 (July 1971): 594.

the resources of all agencies that deal with foreign affairs. Even though the State Department and the NSC share a role that is supportive of the president's foreign policymaking, the reasons for their creation, their potential interactions with the president, and their impacts on the presidency differ greatly.

From its inception in 1789 as one of the first four cabinet agencies, the Department of State has been charged with multiple, complex responsibilities, and moreover has been led by the person assumed to be the president's chief diplomat, the secretary of state. Created as the Department of Foreign Affairs in July 1789 and then rechristened as the Department of State in September 1789 to reflect its additional domestic duties that involved matters of state-building,⁶ the State Department has not only had the mission to support the president's constitutional responsibilities for U.S. foreign policy, but it has also grown a bureaucracy (from an original staff of six in 1790) that has both provided input to the president and additionally directly provided services to U.S. citizens and businesses engaged in travel or work abroad. By the early

⁶ Initial functions included publication and preservation of U.S. laws, recording the commissions of presidential appointees, records functions, preserving custody of the Great Seal, publishing U.S. laws, and controlling patents and copyrights. Other domestic functions subsequently added involved the issuance of patents, publication of census returns, management of the Mint, controlling copyrights, and regulating immigration. Over time, most of these functions, with the exception of those involving the Great Seal, certain protocol functions, the control of international travel, and the publication of certain documents, have transferred to other departments. See: Elmer Plischke, *U.S. Department of State: A Reference History* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995), 37-38, 39.

21st century, the State Department, which included over 30,000 Foreign Service officers, civil service employees, and Foreign Service nationals, maintained diplomatic relations with 180 countries, relations with foreign organizations, and posted staff at 250 offices around the world.⁷

Although the department's mission has both changed and expanded since Thomas Jefferson began work as the first secretary of state in March 1790, one thing has not changed: the secretary of state has been always been known as, and has frequently, but not always operated as, the president's chief foreign affairs advisor. As John Dumbrell has observed: "The case for locating foreign policymaking firmly in the Secretary and the Department of State has been frequently made, and has been accorded lip-service even by its most conspicuous bureaucratic opponents."⁸ Two reasons explain the secretary's prime status. First, the secretary of state, fourth in succession to the president, is "in formal terms, the leading Cabinet officer." And second, even when the department has had a reputation for being unwieldy, it has also enhanced the power of the secretary of state by demonstrating "unmatched expertise and potential for taking

⁷ U.S. Department of State, "Department Organization," *U.S. Department of State*, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/rls/dos/436.htm>.

⁸ Dumbrell noted that even Henry Kissinger, who was the most influential National Security Advisor in U.S. history, believes that "a president should make the secretary of state his principal advisor." As cited in: John Dumbrell, *The Making of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 88.

the long-term perspective on international questions.”⁹ In addition, the high value of the department has been confirmed by the talents and accomplishments of previous secretaries of state who have helped presidents to achieve remarkable foreign policy successes, by the high-quality reputation of the Policy Planning Staff implemented by George Kennan “at the behest of Secretary George Marshall” in 1947,¹⁰ and by the analysis produced by the geographically-based offices.

Although the secretary and the Department of State have been acknowledged as having primacy in the policymaking process, not all presidents have utilized their secretaries extensively in the conduct of foreign policy. When Cyrus Vance took on the position of managing the Department of State, the department had experienced almost 30 years of operating in a policymaking system in which the secretary of state held varying degrees of actual influence. Nevertheless, Vance was convinced that the department needed to have the kind of primacy in the foreign policymaking process that Secretary of State George C. Marshall had enjoyed in the Truman administration. Concerned that the department was “haunted by widespread doubt concerning its primacy and role in the management of foreign affairs,” Vance was “determined to bring the department and the Foreign Service more fully into the process of developing

⁹ Ibid., 89.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of State, “Department Organization,” *U.S. Department of State*.

and implementing policy,” for the simple reason that policies “have to be rooted in the institution charged with implementing them.”¹¹

In 1947, Truman, who indeed looked to his secretary of state as his primary foreign policy advisor, encouraged the creation of a National Security Council (NSC), which was authorized by the National Security Act of 1947 to “coordinate the various strands of national security policy among the agencies then operating under the rubric of national security.”¹² As Anna Nelson has explained, the United States’ post World War II obligations, the “growing tension between the Soviet Union and the United States,” and the relative inexperience of the “untested Harry Truman” suggested the need for a “new institutional arrangement” to coordinate national security policy and to advise the president.¹³ As Truman desired, the NSC authorized by the National Security Act was “a group purely advisory in nature, with no authoritative, statutory functions and a staff appointed at the sole discretion of the president.”¹⁴ The authority and structure of the new planning apparatus, therefore, did not challenge the primacy of the State Department or the secretary. Under Truman, Secretaries of State Marshall

¹¹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 40.

¹² Anna Kasten Nelson, "National Security Council," *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy*, 2002, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_gx5215/is_2002/.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Nelson, "National Security Council," Origins Section, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_gx5215/is_2002/.

and Acheson continued to enjoy “true preeminence, coordinating policy and strengthening the Foreign Service with no interference from the newly formed NSC’s technical staff.”¹⁵

After Congress passed amendments to the National Security Act in 1949 and Truman instituted other reforms by executive order, the national security system was refined, including organizing the modern Department of Defense and locating the NSC in the Executive Office of the President. In addition, the NSC statutory membership was modified to eliminate previous members, such as the three service secretaries, and to include the vice president as a statutory member along with the secretaries of state and defense. The chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and head of the Central Intelligence Agency joined the NSC as advisors. With a more manageable group to advise him, Truman “began to use the council as a group of senior collaborators searching with him for the best policies” particularly after the beginning of the Korean War.¹⁶

Since the Truman administration, the relative power of the State Department and the NSC has varied to reflect presidential preferences. For example, beginning with the administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower, presidents have utilized to different degrees not only the NSC, but a national security advisor to coordinate the formal interagency

¹⁵ Theodore C. Sorenson, "The President and the Secretary of State," *Foreign Affairs* 66, no. 2 (Winter 1987): 233-234.

¹⁶ Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 31-32.

system for foreign policymaking. Over time, the NSC, which has included both statutory and non statutory members, has exercised varying degrees of influence.¹⁷ Moreover, as I.M. Destler has pointed out, the NSC “has become in practice not the powerful, senior advisory forum that was envisioned, but the staff instituted under the council’s name. Presidents employ this staff not just as a link to the permanent government but also as an alternative to it, at least for certain issues they deemed particularly important.”¹⁸

The nature of a president’s relationship with the NSC is most evident in the role a president assigns to the national security advisor, who is always a political appointee and, unlike the secretary of state and other cabinet officials, is not confirmed by the Senate. Not only has the nature of this role and power assigned to it reflected presidential preferences, but the individuals filling the position have also viewed their roles and ambitions in disparate ways.¹⁹ For instance, the first NSC advisor, Robert

¹⁷ The NSC, the formal committee that meets with the president, includes statutory members, such as the secretaries of state and defense, as well as non statutory members designated by the president. See the summary history in U.S. Department of State Office of the Historian, "History of the National Security Council, 1947-1997, August, 1997," *National Security Council*, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/history.html>.

¹⁸ I.M. Destler, "National Security Management: What Presidents Have Wrought," *Political Science Quarterly* 95, no. 4 (Winter 1980-1981): 575.

¹⁹ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 78.

Cutler, believed that the job required a “passion for anonymity.”²⁰ Working under Eisenhower, who actively involved himself in planning sessions, Cutler coordinated and chaired twice-a-week meetings of a planning board of senior officials (assistant secretary-of-state level) to vet issues, and coordinated the once-a-week NSC meetings chaired either by the president, the vice president, or the secretary of state.²¹ When Gordon Gray succeeded Cutler as NSC advisor, Eisenhower expanded his authority and visibility to the extent that Gray’s role was similar to the “authority and scope of responsibility of its equivalent today.”²² Nevertheless, “Eisenhower, like Truman, did not believe in providing the NSC with a policymaking staff in the White House,” and the State Department, Defense Department, and other agencies produced the staff work necessary for budget or policy decisions.²³

McGeorge Bundy, NSC advisor under President John F. Kennedy, established a 48-person staff, restructured it around regional issues, and allocated “specific portfolios” of responsibility to the individual members.²⁴ Bundy furthermore

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 67.

²² Ibid., 78.

²³ Nelson, "National Security Council," Eisenhower Section, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_gx5215/is_2002/.

²⁴ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 84-85.

eliminated the previous distinction between planning and operational activities²⁵ -- a distinction also ignored later by NSC Advisors Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski. Under Bundy, who “readily acknowledged the primacy of Cabinet members and NSC principals,” the “NSC *staff* began to gain power at the expense of the National Security Council,”²⁶ or in other words, “After Kennedy, the NSC meant the advisor, not the council.”²⁷ The development of the independent national security policy staff “reflected Kennedy’s scorn for the bureaucratic State Department,” as well as his desire to have “an action group concerned with events or crisis of the moment.”²⁸

President Lyndon Johnson, who wished to signal that he did not need a Bundy-type of NSC advisor to help him frame foreign policy, appointed Walt Rostow to be Bundy’s replacement as a special assistant to the president. Rostow became a “staff focal point for the president’s personal foreign policy business and for interagency coordination.”²⁹ After holding twenty-five NSC meetings, Johnson substituted lunch

²⁵ McGeorge Bundy to Senator Henry Jackson, *Organizing for National Security* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Senate, Committee on Government Operations, Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery, 1961), Government Printing Office, Volume 1, 1338.

²⁶ Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 99.

²⁷ Nelson, “National Security Council,” *The Kennedy and Johnson Years*, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_gx5215/is_2002/.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Destler, “National Security Management: What Presidents Have Wrought,” 580.

meetings to discuss and formulate policies regarding the Vietnam War. These lunch meetings often included the NSC statutory members and other advisors, but were dominated by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara.³⁰

Henry Kissinger's tenure as NSC advisor in the Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford administrations was notable for the power Kissinger wielded as NSC advisor and for the fact that he was both the NSC advisor and secretary of state from September 1973 until November 1975. When he was solely the NSC advisor, Kissinger acted as "the administration's prime public foreign policy spokesman," and additionally "obliterated all the old distinctions between what the assistant did and what a strong secretary of state would have done."³¹

After President Ford appointed Brent Scowcroft as NSC advisor in November 1975 and retained Kissinger solely as secretary of state, Kissinger revitalized the power of the State Department, and continued to act as Ford's dominant foreign policy advisor and spokesman. Correspondingly, NSC Advisor Brent Scowcroft operated as a policy coordinator, an honest broker, and an aide with minimal media exposure -- behavior that won the approval of analysts who believed that this was appropriate behavior for a political appointee not required to receive Senate confirmation.³² Or, as Rothkopf

³⁰ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 100.

³¹ Destler, "National Security Management," 581.

³² *Ibid.*, 581.

observed, “Kissinger was the auteur of his own foreign policy. Scowcroft was the great collaborator.”³³

Thus, by the time Jimmy Carter assumed the presidency, presidents had employed essentially two models of how to use a national security advisor: one as a coordinator of foreign policy; and the other as chief foreign policy architect and spokesman. Carter’s stated goal was to create a structure and process in which his NSC advisor would be a strong coordinator and ad hoc analyst, his secretary of state would be the chief foreign policy advisor and spokesman (along with the president) and manager of institutional memory, and he himself would be the primary foreign policy architect and spokesman.

The Development of Carter’s National Security System

Jimmy Carter made four pledges about his national security system: first, he would be in charge of foreign policymaking; second, he would not permit any individual to function as a “Lone Ranger engaged in a ‘one-man policy of international adventure’”³⁴ -- an allusion to Henry Kissinger’s role in the Nixon-Ford

³³ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 155.

³⁴ James T. Wooten, "Carter Pledges an Open Foreign Policy," *New York Times*, June 24, 1976, p. 1.

administrations;³⁵ third, his planning system would be collegial and effective; and finally, within this collegial system, Cyrus Vance would be his prime foreign policy advisor and spokesman.³⁶

Carter's foreign policymaking system -- as it was structured and as it operated -- neither produced effective collegiality nor recognized or supported Vance's primacy in the system. Furthermore, Carter's system enabled Zbigniew Brzezinski occasionally to operate as a Lone Ranger and frequently to manipulate the foreign policymaking system. Even though the system that Carter implemented was not the one he pledged to implement, it may have been the system he wanted.

Brzezinski, whom Carter tasked with developing the foreign policymaking process, believed that he knew Carter's mind on these issues of power and process. He acknowledged that "I knew full well that Carter would not wish me to be another Kissinger. At the same time, I also felt confident that he would not let Vance become another Dulles. He wanted to be the decision maker and even more important, to be

³⁵ Brzezinski acknowledged that he could not be a "lone ranger," that he would have to "low key it..." See: Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Carter Presidency Project, Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, February 18, 1982, *The Miller Center*, and Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 48.

³⁶ Carter frequently alluded to Vance's primacy in meetings with State Department staff and with representatives of the media. For two examples, see: Jimmy Carter, "In his First Outing at the State Department, March 21, 1977," *Department of State Bulletin* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office) 260; and Bernard Gwertzman, "President Stresses Vance's Role as his Foreign Policy Spokesman," *The New York Times*, June 22, 1978, sec. A, p. 1.

perceived as one.”³⁷ Brzezinski further understood how potential power was imbedded in structure. He therefore proposed a planning system that assigned to himself not only the substantial power that flowed from proximity as national security advisor in the White House, but also lead responsibilities for the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) and crisis management. As Brzezinski stressed, “What I sought, therefore, was to have an institutional arrangement whereby I could help to shape those decisions. The new system made that eminently feasible.”³⁸ How did Brzezinski make this happen? How did Vance, who had extensive high-level bureaucratic experience and so much at stake in the policy planning system, let this happen?

During the December 1976 pre-inaugural planning meetings Carter held with his cabinet, Brzezinski, and other staff on St. Simon Island in Georgia, Brzezinski presented Carter with a NSC decisionmaking format that he and his new deputy, David Aaron, had developed. Brzezinski recommended a system of seven committees, three of which would be chaired by Brzezinski (crisis management, arms control, and covert activities), and four others which would be chaired by the secretary of state, the secretary of defense, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the

³⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 63.

³⁸ Ibid.

secretary of the treasury respectively.³⁹ Brzezinski's proposal was a striking departure from previous NSC structures because never before had a NSC advisor chaired a cabinet-level committee.

After reviewing Brzezinski's proposal, Carter rejected the seven committee structure because of its complexity, but supported the notion that Brzezinski should play a significant role in the process. Signaling to Brzezinski that he wanted a process that would "engage the Cabinet more fully in the national security decision-making process," and that would also "accustom Cabinet members to working as a team under each other's chairmanship and *that of the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs* (emphasis added)," Carter expressed a preference for a two-committee system, one a policy committee, with the responsible department secretaries chairing meetings dealing with foreign policy, defense, international economic, and intelligence issues, and the other, a coordination committee, with Brzezinski chairing meetings dealing with arms control and crisis management issues.⁴⁰

Emboldened by Carter's guidance at the St. Simon's meetings, Brzezinski drafted a second proposed structure, the one ultimately endorsed by Carter. Under this structure, Brzezinski would be able not only to dominate or heavily influence the

³⁹Brzezinski, "Carter Presidency Project. Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, February 18, 1982," *The Miller Center*.

⁴⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 59-60.

deliberations concerning the most contentious issues of the administration related to the Soviet Union, but also to coordinate and manipulate the process for all issues.

Brzezinski's description of how he crafted and delightedly preempted discussion of the proposed structure revealed both his desire for substantial power and Carter's willingness to grant it to him. After Carter had expressed a preference for a two-committee system, Brzezinski and Carter developed the basic structure one evening during the St. Simon's meetings. The first committee, a Policy Review Committee (PRC) chaired by a secretary of a department, would develop analysis and recommendations on key policy issues. Although Brzezinski would not chair a PRC or direct its work, he would have a coordination role, including the ability to recommend that a PRC be convened. As Brzezinski recounted: "Prior to each meeting, the notion was that I would submit to Carter informing him that a PRC is to be held on such and such a topic and that I recommend that the Secretary of State or the Secretary of Defense chair it. You approve it. (emphasis added)."⁴¹ Brzezinski would chair the second committee, the Special Coordination Committee (SCC), which would be responsible for crosscutting interagency issues, such as covert activity, arms control,

⁴¹ Brzezinski, "Carter Presidency Project. Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, February 18, 1982," *The Miller Center*.

and crisis management. Brzezinski maintained that “Carter loved that.”⁴² He then elaborated:

I drew up with David Aaron, my deputy, a memorandum which we called a presidential directive because we changed the names of the previous papers. I took it to the Kennedy Center, at the time of the presidential gala the evening before the inaugural, and during the intermission got Carter out and had him sign it, and the next day at 3 p.m. right after the inaugural I had messengers deliver copies of it to Brown and to Vance and to whoever was acting before [CIA Director Stansfield] Turner to inform them of the new arrangements. They were surprised.⁴³

Brzezinski’s comment about Brown’s and Vance’s surprise was an understatement. The Brzezinski-designed foreign policymaking apparatus, described in Presidential Directive/NSC-1 and Presidential Directive/NSC-2 and promulgated without discussion among the foreign policy principals, constituted an impressive power grab by Brzezinski, but a power grab apparently allowed and even encouraged by Carter.⁴⁴ Although Carter stated in PD/NSC-2 that the directive’s purpose was “to place more responsibility in the departments and agencies,” he also clarified that he

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Jimmy Carter, “PD-1 and PD-2. Establishment of Presidential Review and Directives Series, NSC, and the National Security System, January 20, 1977,” *Jimmy Carter Library*, <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/pddirectives>.

wished to ensure “that the NSC, with my Assistant for National Security Affairs, continues to integrate and facilitate foreign and defense policy decisions.”⁴⁵

The Nature and Location of Power in Carter’s Planning System

The structure of the planning system proposed by Brzezinski was precisely what Carter thought he wanted. The nature of the planning system, however, was inconsistent with what Vance believed Carter had promised him about his role in the system. Although Carter intended that his planning apparatus would be disciplined, responsive, and focused on his major foreign policy goals, instead it produced serious unintended consequences. Because the foreign policy principals did not “share a common policy direction, and Carter failed to provide it,” Carter’s system often produced “a policy that zigzagged.”⁴⁶ From Vance’s vantage point, the planning system was never a neutral vehicle for decisionmaking. When Vance functioned as Carter’s prime foreign policy aide and spokesman, he often did so in spite of a system that was procedurally and analytically stacked against him.

The formal and informal components of Carter’s planning system reflected his belief that a spokes-of-the-wheel collegial system would enhance his knowledge and control as a foreign policy leader, would allow him to analyze and master complex

⁴⁵ Ibid., “PD-2. The National Security Council System.”

⁴⁶ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 623.

information from diverse sources, would prevent the emergence of a Kissinger-type Lone Ranger, and would produce optimal policies.⁴⁷ The formal components of the planning system included the authorities granted to a Policy Review Committee (PRC) and a Special Coordination Committee (SCC), committees that Brzezinski either helped to coordinate or chaired outright. The informal components of the system included the deliberations that occurred during Carter's weekly lunches with key advisors such as Vice President Walter Mondale, Secretary of State Vance, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, Hamilton Jordan, Rosalyn Carter, and Brzezinski.⁴⁸ The system's informal components also encompassed scheduled meetings with these advisors, scheduled reviews of briefing papers, and other gatherings and meetings, such as the weekends Carter and Vance spent at Camp David.

The structure of the formal planning system did not prevent Carter from using Vance as his chief foreign policy advisor and spokesman. On the other hand, no element of the system's structure acknowledged Vance's supposed preeminence. Vance's power flowed from Carter's assurance of primacy, from the resources provided by the Department of State, and from his own expertise and integrity. The sources of Vance's power were, therefore, in large part personal and depended upon Carter's willingness to use Vance as his prime foreign policy aide and spokesman.

⁴⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 58.

⁴⁸ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 169-172.

The formal planning system also did not achieve for Carter the benefits he assumed that collegiality would provide. For this system to have been effective would have required that Carter specify foreign policy goals that cabinet members and key advisors would adhere to, and that Carter would also ensure that all parties function as honest participants and brokers. Carter frequently did not provide consistent strategic direction on key issues, and did not enforce his requirement that all staff exhibit honest, professional behavior. As a result, Carter's policymaking system lacked focus and clarity, tended to operate in a competitive, contentious way without strategic anchors, and ultimately subverted Carter's goals. From Hodding Carter's perspective, Jimmy Carter's collegial system, as it was defined and as it was implemented, created a "civil war inside the administration which was never resolved."⁴⁹

The Nature of Jimmy Carter's Power in the Planning System

Historians, political scientists, and contemporary observers of the administration have generally agreed that Jimmy Carter dominated the formal and informal policymaking apparatus, and deliberately established a decision-making process that he believed would enhance his power and control. For example, Stuart Eizenstat, Carter's

⁴⁹ Hodding Carter III, "Interview with Hodding Carter III, December 6, 1993," Interview by Charles Stuart Kennedy, *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, CD-Rom.

chief domestic advisor, confirmed that Carter embraced a “spokes on the wheel” management model, in which the various spokes fed into him but did not feed into each other:

I think he felt he would work best if the people who were advising him had direct access to him and didn’t have to go through someone else. It’s also an indication of an important strain in his thinking, which is that he was going to be the Chief of Staff and the coordinator. He wanted to be the one who pulled the pieces together rather than having someone do it for him.⁵⁰

Although Carter spoke of a collegial system, which meant a collective sharing of power and authority, he did not intend to share power. Central to Carter’s definition of his leadership themes and his role as a foreign policy leader was his belief that conducting foreign affairs “is a responsibility of the president.”⁵¹ Throughout his administration, Carter reaffirmed his role: “The point is that I make the ultimate decisions about foreign policy...in this country, I’m the President, I make the decisions, and I want to be responsible for those decisions once they are made.”⁵² Nevertheless, Carter’s collegial system did not operate effectively for three dominant reasons.

⁵⁰ Eizenstat, "Carter Presidency Project, Interview with Stuart Eizenstat, January 29, 1982," *The Miller Center*.

⁵¹ "Second Carter-Ford Presidential Debate," *The American Presidency Project*, October 6, 1976.

⁵² Jimmy Carter, "The President's News Conference of June 26, 1978," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pip=30999&st=van>.

First, Carter did not provide clear, consistent policy direction for his advisors.⁵³ Cyrus Vance believed that he had obtained Carter's firm commitment to the four principles of foreign policy that he and Carter had discussed prior to Vance's acceptance of the position of secretary of state.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Carter never announced these goals as the lynchpin of his policies. Brzezinski believed that Carter was or would be committed to his world view – a world view organized according to ten major foreign policy objectives and sub steps, and detailed in a forty-page memorandum that was prepared without input from the vice president, the secretaries of state or defense, or the CIA director.⁵⁵ Even though Brzezinski stated that "the President was quite taken" with this paper, "referred to it on several occasions," and praised it "as an unusually useful document," Carter, did not articulate the world view that Brzezinski described in this memo to a national or international audience, nor did Brzezinski's memo circulate internally as a statement of the administration's foreign policymaking themes.⁵⁶ Essentially, Vance embraced his four tenets of foreign policy, Brzezinski

⁵³ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 623.

⁵⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 27-29.

⁵⁵ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 623.

⁵⁶ In fact, only Carter, Brzezinski, and Vance ultimately had copies of it. See: Brzezinski, "Carter Presidency Project, Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, February 18, 1982," *The Miller Center*, and a summary of the paper in Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 53-56.

embraced his ten major foreign policy objectives, and Carter embraced a laundry list of things he wanted to accomplish.

Second, in selecting Vance to head the State Department and Brzezinski to direct the National Security Council, Carter tapped two individuals, who held fundamentally different views about the U.S.-Soviet relationship, to fill his most critical foreign policy advisory positions. During the summer of 1976, when the presidential campaign was in full swing, 60,000 individuals, who had higher incomes, interest in foreign affairs, and education than the average U.S. citizen, were surveyed about their support for détente by the Foreign Policy Association as part of its Great Decisions program. Over 71% of those surveyed favored détente.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, in spite of support for détente among certain segments of the American electorate, détente was a contentious issue in both political parties, in part because “it was deliberately obscured as diplomacy and oversold as politics. The genuine benefits for both sides” during the Nixon/Ford administrations “were possible largely because points of friction were left vague, and the politicians in Washington and Moscow could exaggerate the easing of tensions for purposes of their own political power and prestige.”⁵⁸ During his presidential campaign, Carter “played a balancing act in which his criticism of Nixon,

⁵⁷ "Foreign Policy Survey Finds 71% Support Policy of Detente," *The New York Times*, July 11, 1976, sec. A, p. 12.

⁵⁸ Roger Morris, "Detente Is in the Eye of the Beholder," *The New York Times*, May 30, 1976, sec. A, p. 7.

Ford, and Kissinger were designed to be appealing to both wings of his political party.”⁵⁹

Carter essentially continued this balancing act by choosing Vance and Brzezinski as his key advisors. The Vance appointment was compatible with the views of Democratic party members who argued that the Soviets were not trying “to achieve a war-winning nuclear capability,” and that arms control could be “a way for the two superpowers to plan and manage the continuing growth of their nuclear arsenals,” as well as work towards arms reduction.⁶⁰ Brzezinski’s views about the nature of Soviet power were consistent with the positions of Democratic Party members who were concerned that the Soviet Union was a fundamentally aggressive power, intent upon “using arms control and détente” to achieve nuclear superiority.⁶¹ For a brief period, Brzezinski had also advised Senator Henry Jackson, a key leader of the conservative wing of the party, during his unsuccessful 1976 presidential campaign.⁶² Because of Brzezinski’s advisory relationship with Jackson, his reputation as “a hard-liner on relations with Moscow,” and his emphasis on talking “more toughly about détente” and stressing “issues like the denial of human rights in the Soviet Union and Eastern

⁵⁹ Strong, *Working in the World*, 19.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁶¹ Ibid., 17.

⁶² Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 6.

Europe,”⁶³ he was positioned to relate effectively to the Committee on President Danger, a lobbying group established in the fall of 1976 to press for hard-line defense policies.⁶⁴ Although Carter initially subscribed to Vance’s view of how to “contain Soviet expansion while reinvigorating the long-term American effort to moderate U.S.-Soviet tensions,”⁶⁵ over time he allowed Brzezinski to whittle away at what Brzezinski deemed Vance’s “excessively benign view of the Soviet and Cuban penetration of Africa,”⁶⁶ and to play “the China card” by visiting China and making “provocative remarks in public” about Soviet behavior at a “sensitive point in the SALT negotiations.”⁶⁷ This dichotomy between what Carter said about Vance’s power and positions and the authority he granted to Brzezinski – both overtly and passively – weakened Vance, and over time provoked increased criticism of Carter by foreign affairs specialists and the media about his weak, “indecisive” foreign policy leadership.⁶⁸

⁶³ Leslie H. Gelb, "Brzezinski Viewed as Key Adviser to Carter," *The New York Times*, October 6, 1976, sec. A, p. 24.

⁶⁴ Strong, *Working in the World*, 23.

⁶⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 45.

⁶⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 143.

⁶⁷ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 116.

⁶⁸ Hedrick Smith, "Carter’s Foreign Policy: A Middle Course," *The New York Times*, February 21, 1979, sec. A, p. 6.

Third, having failed to articulate key foreign policy strategies and having selected two individuals as key advisors who held fundamentally incompatible views about U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union, Carter further failed to ensure that all spokes of his policymaking wheel operated under the same set of rules. One sign that not all of the policy aides operated under the same professional code of ethics was the amount of public undermining of each other's positions via leaks, a problem that Carter lamented about, speculated about, but never resolved.⁶⁹ Instead of recognizing and acknowledging Brzezinski's key role in these leaks,⁷⁰ Carter attributed them largely to disaffected officials in the Department of State.⁷¹ Although certain officials in the State Department had leaked information to the media, Vance restricted this and disciplined his staff when it occurred.⁷² Moreover, when Vance disagreed with Carter's positions or was frustrated by Brzezinski's actions, he did not leak his disagreements to the media or seek to undermine Brzezinski's NSC staff. Instead, he addressed the issue directly

⁶⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 62.

⁷⁰ Brzezinski's frequent "talks with reporters on a nonattributable basis" was the source of many leaks. See, John W. Finney, "Carter Said to Tell Aides to Curb Talk," *The New York Times*, February 8, 1979, sec. A, p. 13.

⁷¹ Carter emphasized, for example, that he was disturbed "at the apparent reluctance in the State Department to carry out my directives fully and with enthusiasm," and that he chastised the National Security Council staff about leaking only to "balance the slate." See p. 458 of Carter's *Keeping Faith*.

⁷² Destler, Gelb, and Lake, *Our Own Worst Enemy*, 96.

and privately with President Carter and sometimes with Brzezinski.⁷³ Warren Christopher, Vance's deputy at the State Department, was one of many officials who emphasized that Vance "refused to play the bureaucratic games of the Washington insiders, the tricks seen with unusual frequency in dealings between the State Department and the NSC."⁷⁴ Indeed, Christopher noted that: "One of my first instructions from Vance was to tamp down any moves by our subordinates that would abrade the NSC staff."⁷⁵ Ironically, Brzezinski, who frequently talked "with reporters on a nonattributable basis," was the source of many significant leaks⁷⁶ and one of the loudest critics of Cyrus Vance for failing to curtail State Department leaks.⁷⁷ Hodding Carter III laughed at the audacity of Brzezinski being critical of State Department leaks when Brzezinski himself was the worst offender in the administration.⁷⁸ The fact that Carter ignored Brzezinski's and his staff's frequent leaking, and castigated and exaggerated the number of leaks from the Department of State ultimately strengthened

⁷³ Vance described the actions he took after finding out from George Ball that Brzezinski had set up direct channels to Iran during the Iranian crisis without informing the State Department: See Vance, *Hard Choices*, 328.

⁷⁴ Warren Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 88.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Finney, "Carter Said to Tell Aides to Curb Talk," p. 13.

⁷⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 40.

⁷⁸ Hodding Carter stated this in his interview with the author on March 15, 2006.

Brzezinski's spoke of the wheel at the expense of Vance's, exacerbated the deep policy differences within the administration, and increased the perception that the administration was indecisive.⁷⁹

The Nature of Cyrus Vance's Power in the Planning System

In addition to the power inherent in managing a large federal bureaucracy with a critical mission, Cyrus Vance's power as secretary of state stemmed from two sources: the authority and influence granted to him by Jimmy Carter in the policymaking process, and the authority that flowed from his integrity, deep knowledge of foreign policy, and widely-respected expertise.

As clear as Carter was about his own role in the exercise of foreign policy, he was similarly emphatic in his public statements about the role of his secretary of state. Indeed, Carter publicly anointed Vance as his number one foreign policy advisor, and held to this definition of Vance's role -- in public statements, but not necessarily in actions -- until Vance's resignation. In deciding to be Carter's secretary of state, Vance assumed that the State Department would play a critical role in the policymaking process. Although Carter clarified that "the final decisions on basic foreign policy

⁷⁹ See Richard Burt, "Leaks May Be Inevitable in the Ship of State," *The New York Times*, February 18, 1979, sec. E, p.4. His article characterized the leaking activity as a "struggle for Mr. Carter's 'soul' on critical problems."

would be made by me in the Oval Office, and not in the State Department,”⁸⁰ he always coupled this assertion with two assurances: first, that he and Vance would be the nation’s spokesmen on foreign affairs; and second, that Vance’s access to him would be unfiltered.⁸¹

After his inauguration, Carter appeared to be purposefully emphatic about Vance’s role as his chief foreign policy advisor and spokesman. In his first question-and-answer session with Department of State employees, Carter declared that “when our country speaks, it ought to speak with a strong voice,” and then referenced that the strong voice would be that of “the President and the Secretary of State.”⁸² Cabinet Secretary Jack Watson likewise publicly affirmed that “the guidelines for Vance and Brzezinski are clear: the Secretary of State is the principal advisor on foreign policy; Brzezinski provides the President with independent staff advice on the mix of questions arising out of the State Department and the defense and intelligence communities.”⁸³ After news reports surfaced in June 1978 that Vance and Brzezinski were battling for

⁸⁰ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 55.

⁸¹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 34.

⁸² Jimmy Carter, "Department of State Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with Department Employees, February 24, 1977," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print/php?pid=7021>.

⁸³ Marilyn Berger, "Vance and Brzezinski. Peaceful coexistence or guerrilla war?," *The New York Times*, February 13, 1977, sec. A, pp. 19, 21.

influence with Carter about Soviet policy, Carter again clarified for members of Congress that “he was the chief spokesman on foreign affairs for his Administration and that Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance was the principal spokesman for him.”⁸⁴

In addition to numerous, unvarying public affirmations of Vance’s role, Carter also, to a significant degree, honored his pledge of unfiltered access to Vance. If Vance needed to, he could always get through to Carter on the phone, and spent a considerable amount of time with Carter on weekends at Camp David. Furthermore, Vance prepared an evening report for the president – “a brief report on and an analysis of important foreign events and policy developments” in which Vance raised key policy issues without Brzezinski’s input – one of the rare documents that bypassed Brzezinski’s review.⁸⁵ On the other hand, Brzezinski controlled other important access points to Carter. As Brzezinski pointed out, Carter “would never see the Secretary of Defense or State or the head of CIA without me present, except on very special occasions, particularly when the relationship with Vance became difficult...Then there were a few times when Vance saw him alone, and I guess a couple of times when Vance went in to

⁸⁴ Bernard Gwertzman, "President Stresses Vance's Role as his Foreign Policy Spokesman," *The New York Times*, June 22, 1978, sec. A, p. 1.

⁸⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 38-39.

complain about me and saw him alone. Other than that the practice was always for me to be present.”⁸⁶

Did Carter intend to treat Vance as his primary foreign policy advisor? Did he want Vance to feel secure with the power he supposedly had granted him? The historical record is not clear. On the one hand, Carter consistently stated that Vance was his primary spokesman, offered him considerable unfiltered access, and frequently embraced Vance’s positions, including relying heavily on Vance’s work at Camp David. On the other hand, the foreign policy apparatus established by PD-1 and PD-2 not only did not recognize Vance’s primacy, but also enabled Brzezinski, often with Carter’s acquiescence, to challenge it overtly and covertly. From the spring of 1978 until his resignation, Vance often had to fight not only to preserve the role Carter promised him, but also to maintain the East-West policies that he believed Carter had embraced and Brzezinski was undermining.

Carter’s post-presidential statements regarding Vance’s policymaking role, although possibly colored by Vance’s resignation and Carter’s electoral loss, suggested that his support for Vance and his appreciation of the role of the State Department were never as firm as his public statements conveyed. When questioned in an oral history interview about his view of Vance and the State Department, Carter belittled Vance’s

⁸⁶ Brzezinski, "Carter Presidency Project. Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, February 18, 1981," *The Miller Center*.

protectiveness of the State Department's role as if it reflected an unreasonable position on Vance's part: "Whenever Zbig went anywhere or said anything, it created tremors in the State Department. Vance was extremely protective of the State Department. Cy was very, very sensitive" about any "usurpation of its authority or vestige of influence, to a fault..."⁸⁷ Retreating from any possible implication that he had granted Vance or the State Department substantial power, Carter stressed: "I used the State Department as a kind of anchor or screen to hold us back from doing things that were ill-advised, to point out all the steps why something wouldn't work, and to make sure that we didn't take any radical steps. It was kind of a stabilizing factor."⁸⁸

The power inherent in Vance's institutional position in the Department of State, in his expertise, and in his reputation for integrity was often substantial. Jimmy Carter appreciated and shared Vance's approach to many issues. For instance, as Counsel to the President Lloyd Cutler pointed out, when Carter went to Camp David to reflect on policies, he chose Vance, not Brzezinski, to accompany him.⁸⁹ Furthermore, because Carter recognized Vance's ability to drive a foreign policy negotiation and employ staff effectively, he primarily relied on Vance, not Brzezinski, for support during his Camp

⁸⁷ Carter, "Carter Presidency Project. Interview with Jimmy Carter, November 29, 1982," *The Miller Center*.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Lloyd Cutler, "Interview with author, May 10, 2002.

David negotiations. As late as the spring of 1979, after a number of Vance/Brzezinski battles had been publicized, Carter appeared to continue to embrace Vance's approach to Soviet and other policies. As Bernard Gwertzman suggested: "...what the President shares with his Secretary of State is a profound sense of caution, an almost religious view of the ambiguity of human events, a refusal to see every change as a gain or loss for us or for the Russians."⁹⁰ Indeed, when Lloyd Cutler was questioned about why Carter allowed and even encouraged Brzezinski to assert himself actively in the policymaking process in ways that clearly undermined Vance's authority, Cutler stated that he was baffled by Carter's refusal to address the problems created by Brzezinski because Vance more than anyone else appeared to enjoy Carter's confidence. Cutler observed: "I will never understand it."⁹¹

Cyrus Vance's power, while it had an important structural basis from the authority that flowed from managing a critical agency and from his active participation in Carter's formal and informal planning system, was primarily grounded in his personal relationship with Carter. Vance did not control the policymaking process, that is, how foreign policy issues got framed, vetted, and managed. His influence stemmed from his expertise and integrity, and from Carter's decisions about how much influence

⁹⁰ Bernard Gwertzman, "Cyrus Vance Plays It Cool," *The New York Times*, March 18, 1979, sec. SM, p. 34.

⁹¹ Cutler, "Interview with author," May 10, 2002.

to grant him on any given issue at any given time. While all key foreign policy advisors depend ultimately on the president for influence, the fact that Carter's planning system was managed by an individual who advocated fundamentally different foreign policies on East-West relations and operated under a different code of professional behavior would prove to be a fatal blow to Vance's influence over time, and help to create the conditions that provoked his principled resignation.

The Nature of Zbigniew Brzezinski's Power in the Planning System

As national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski ostensibly wielded less power than Cyrus Vance according to a number of measures, including an important one: the total number of key policy battles won and lost during the Carter administration.⁹² Brzezinski, however, won the final battle in his successful advocacy for the hostage rescue mission in Iran. Why did Brzezinski prevail? Why did Carter ultimately embrace Brzezinski's advice over that of a secretary of state whose views and concerns generally matched his own?

The nature of Brzezinski's power relative to Vance's was a critical factor in the decisionmaking process. Brzezinski had three sources of power that Vance did not possess: first, the planning and management functions that Carter assigned to him on

⁹² Leslie H. Gelb, "Vance -- Torn by Ideals and by Loyalty to Carter," *The New York Times*, April 29, 1980, sec. A, p. 23.

Inauguration Day in his first two presidential directives; second, proximity to the president – a proximity that was particularly important to a president without foreign policy experience who wished to be a hands-on foreign policy leader; and third, Brzezinski's willingness and ability to fight for additional power and influence using tools that Vance refused to employ. In addition, the fact that Carter entered office at a time in which "the foundations of détente were cracking" and "public support for arms control" appeared to be declining enhanced Brzezinski's ability to promote his views about the nature of Soviet power.⁹³

The discrepancy between the power that Jimmy Carter stated that he granted to NSC Advisor Brzezinski during the first days of the administration and the power that he actually granted to him over time constituted a key root of Vance's battles for principle and power as secretary of state. On December 17, 1976, President-elect Carter held a news conference to announce presidential appointments to key offices, including Brzezinski's appointment as NSC advisor. Carter's central message was that the national security advisor's role would be a limited, supportive one, and would primarily entail coordination: "This position is one that ties together in the most effective way the President, the economic forces in our country, including the Secretary of the Treasury,

⁹³ Strong, *Working in the World*, 16-17.

the Secretary of State, and, of course, the Defense Department.”⁹⁴ In response to a reporter’s question during this news conference, Brzezinski not only affirmed this understanding of the position, but also acknowledged Vance’s policymaking primacy: “I would just like to say....that I see my responsibility as being primarily that of enhancing the decision-making process involving the President and first of all and above all his primary advisor on foreign affairs, the Secretary of State, as well as the Secretaries of Defense, Treasury, and others.”⁹⁵ Brzezinski further asserted: “I don’t envisage my job as a policymaking job. I see my job essentially as heading the operational staff of the President, helping him to integrate policy, but above all helping him to facilitate the process of decision-making in which he will consult closely with his principal Cabinet members.”⁹⁶

Few observers of the Carter administration appeared to believe that Brzezinski would exercise the limited role of coordinator. Immediately after Carter’s inauguration, news reports featuring Brzezinski and the role of the National Security Council noted: “No other office in the Carter administration is being established with comparable

⁹⁴ Jimmy Carter, "Transcript of Carter's News Conference Introducing his Three New Appointments," *The New York Times*, December 17, 1976, sec. A, p. 32.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Leslie H. Gelb, "Brzezinski Says He'll Give Advice to Carter Only When He Asks for It," *The New York Times*, December 17, 1976, sec. A, p. 33.

declarations about what it will not do.”⁹⁷ The media’s skepticism about Brzezinski’s publicly-defined role in part was derived from the fact that the powers granted by the president to Brzezinski in his first two presidential directives -- those powers inherent in the structure of the planning and review process -- were substantial. While they might be interpreted as coordination roles, they in fact ensured that Brzezinski had the potential to influence substance as much as he controlled process. Brzezinski himself acknowledged this in his memoirs and in oral histories of the Carter administration. A major theme of his memoirs, *Power and Principle*, was that Carter had bestowed upon him significant levers of power. Although Brzezinski did not chair the Policy Review Committees (PRCs) that were assigned to the cabinet secretaries primarily responsible for vetting issues and producing recommendations, he and his staff prepared the meeting reports to the President, including summaries, minutes, recommendations for approval, and requests for decision. In addition, Brzezinski transmitted the decision memoranda from the President with his own signed cover memo, and occasionally signed some presidential directives.⁹⁸ Therefore, although Carter granted the cabinet secretaries increased power through their chairmanship of the PRCs which were to be “responsible for setting broad and longer-term policy lines,” Brzezinski controlled key

⁹⁷ Murray Marder, "Carter and Brzezinski Stress What NSC Chief Will Not Do," *The New York Times*, January 24, 1977, sec. A, p. 3.

⁹⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 61-62.

policymaking tools.⁹⁹ As William W. Newmann has pointed out, the formal authorities granted by Carter to Brzezinski in his first two presidential directives allowed Brzezinski either to chair a committee of substance or to function as a power broker.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, through his chairmanship and control of the Special Coordination Committee (SCC), Brzezinski had responsibility not only for crisis management, but also the decisionmaking process regarding SALT. As Brzezinski noted, this allowed him to “have a major input on our policy toward the Soviet Union,” and “to be in a position to shape the agenda and thus influence the outcome of our deliberations.”¹⁰¹ The influence that flowed from controlling major inputs into the SALT process was particularly important because Brzezinski and Vance had fundamentally different views about how the United States should address key aspects of Soviet behavior.

Thus, although both the President and Brzezinski initially defined the NSC advisor role as that of a policy and process coordinator, neither intended that Brzezinski would limit the scope and depth of his role to coordination alone. Indeed, Carter emphasized that Brzezinski’s NSC role placed him “in a special category” – one that accorded him “the same rank as Cabinet secretaries,” albeit a cabinet secretary not

⁹⁹ Ibid., 63.

¹⁰⁰ William W. Newmann, "The Structures of National Security Decision Making: Leadership, Institutions, and Politics in the Carter, Reagan, and G.H.W. Bush Years," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (June 2004): 282.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

requiring Senate confirmation.¹⁰² In fact, as Carter acknowledged in his memoirs, the special category to which Carter assigned Brzezinski was essentially that of chief policy analyst – a role that Vance assumed properly belonged to him and to his key officials in the State Department. Carter clarified that he had looked to Brzezinski to be the individual who would direct people to produce “incisive analyses of strategic concepts,” and that he encouraged Brzezinski to be “prolific in the production of new ideas.”¹⁰³

Furthermore, Brzezinski apparently sensed that Carter viewed his advisor role as expansive, not limited. From the first days of the administration, Brzezinski’s private and public behavior reflected his belief that his role should be deeply substantive. Even in the news conference in which Carter announced his appointment as NSC advisor, Brzezinski took the opportunity to provide his policy perspective on détente with the Soviet Union and on the SALT agreement¹⁰⁴ – an action witnessed by a reporter who said “I knew right then and there that all this talk about not repeating the Kissinger experience was just hogwash. This guy wanted to make policy and nobody was going to stop him.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 49.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 55-56.

¹⁰⁴ "Transcript of Carter's News Conference Introducing His Three New Appointees," *The New York Times*, December 17, 1976, sec. B, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Burt, "Zbig Makes History," *The New York Times*, July 30, 1978, sec. SM, p. 2.

In a post-administration review of his performance, Brzezinski acknowledged that Carter and he always saw the NSC position as an expansive, substantive one. In fact, Brzezinski insisted that he did not want to be secretary of state because, in reality, his job was potentially far more powerful:

I always wanted the job of Assistant for National Security Affairs in the White House for a very simple reason. It was a more important job. It was the key job. It involved the integration of the top inputs from State, Defense and CIA. And above all, it meant that you were close to a President whom I knew would be an activist. And, therefore, being close to him and working with him was centrally important.¹⁰⁶

As director of Carter's "Think Tank" and with the authority granted him by the first two presidential directives,¹⁰⁷ Brzezinski recognized he could operate as a chief policy czar:

I wanted to be a source of fresh thinking for him, because I strongly believed that under a creative, intelligent, ambitious, and assertive individual like Jimmy Carter, the Presidency would be the point of departure for all national policy. And I was given that post. It was, in fact, that of a "grand vizier" with its many rewards and frustrations.¹⁰⁸

Moreover, Brzezinski revealed that from the very beginning of the Carter administration he embraced the advisor position because it contained all the elements of substantial power:

¹⁰⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Exit Interview, February 20, 1981," *Jimmycarterlibrary.org*, [http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/library/exit interview](http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/library/exit%20interview).

¹⁰⁷ George Urban, "A Long Conversation with Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski. The Perils of Foreign Policy," *Encounter* 56 (January-June 1981): 16.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

If the President is going to make and run foreign policy, then you want to be with him, rather than to be under the receiving end in the Department. That immediately conveyed to me the notion that the Assistant for National Security affairs would be, at least to some extent, an initiator of policy as well as its coordinator.¹⁰⁹

In fact, after leaving office, Brzezinski criticized Carter for creating the “illusion of the primacy of the Secretary of State,” and pointed out that this illusion enabled observers to focus on discord rather than on the policies enunciated by the White House.¹¹⁰

Not only did Jimmy Carter bestow significant power on his national security advisor through his explicit, expansive roles in the planning system, but more importantly he augmented Brzezinski’s power to formulate and articulate U.S. foreign policy over time. Although observers of Carter’s first year in the White House concluded that Brzezinski was “just one of several important actors in the policy arena,” and that in most cases he played “second fiddle to Cy Vance,”¹¹¹ by the summer of 1978, Brzezinski had developed the reputation for being a Lone Ranger – a surprising development since Carter had insisted during his presidential campaign that he did not want Lone Rangers in his administration. In particular, observers suggested that

¹⁰⁹ Brzezinski, “Carter Presidency Project. Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, February 18, 1982,” *The Miller Center*.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹¹¹ Richard Burt, “Probing the Brzezinski Factor,” *The New York Times*, December 25, 1977, p. 103.

Brzezinski was playing a “leading role in the administration’s new ‘get tough policy’ regarding the Soviet Union.”¹¹²

Although Brzezinski actively sought to expand his power and influence, it would be a mistake to credit Brzezinski alone for this power augmentation. Brzezinski’s consolidation of greater power as a “grand vizier” was generally done with Carter’s blessing. As a *Washington Post* editorial emphasized at the conclusion of the Carter administration: “the source of Mr. Brzezinski’s freedom to maneuver and to express and to impose his views...was the president, Jimmy Carter....If President Carter didn’t know what Mr. Brzezinski was up to, that in itself would almost have been grounds for impeachment, since he would have been the only person in Washington over the age of nine who didn’t.”¹¹³

Carter’s decision to give Brzezinski greater voice and greater power over time -- a decision that fundamentally undermined Vance’s role and influence -- had both understandable and inexplicable elements. When asked to justify this decision, Carter explained that he encouraged Brzezinski to speak to the media because he was not pleased that Vance was “not particularly inclined to assume this task (the education of the American public about foreign policy) on a sustained basis,” and that “Zbigniew

¹¹² Richard Burt, "Zbig Makes it Big," *The New York Times*, July 30, 1978, SM, p. 3.

¹¹³ Editorial, "Zbig the Heavy," *The New York Times*, January 5, 1981, p. 16.

Brzezinski was always ready and willing to explain our position on international matters, analyze a basic strategic interrelationship, or comment on a current event.”¹¹⁴ Indeed, admirers of Vance’s deep expertise and commitment agreed with President Carter’s observation that Vance did not sufficiently engage the media. Leslie Gelb, director of the Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs under Vance, noted that Vance “was curiously inarticulate and apolitical” – a man who was defined more “through his actions than words.”¹¹⁵ Gelb further suggested that “Vance helped to defeat himself by not taking his case relentlessly to the American people, by neglecting the role of educator, by being so uncomfortable with the news media.”¹¹⁶

By asking Brzezinski to speak out and not restraining his content or tone, Carter violated his primacy pledge to Vance, and enlarged the public role of his national security advisor -- an individual that he himself recognized had shown inclinations to “pursue a path that might be ill-advised.”¹¹⁷ As George Ball argued after extensive

¹¹⁴ Carter implied that Vance did not want to do communication tasks because they were “time-consuming and not always pleasant.” This disparaging remark ignored that Vance was not averse to time-consuming tasks, but his extensive foreign travel and commitment to providing high-quality, accurate information that would not jeopardize negotiations often constrained his interactions with the media. See, Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 56.

¹¹⁵ Leslie Gelb, “The Vance Legacy,” *The New Republic*, May 10, 1980, 14.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹¹⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 57.

dealings with Carter, Vance, and Brzezinski regarding Iranian issues, Carter's decisions to empower Brzezinski -- even his initial decision to appoint Brzezinski to the NSC position -- was an extraordinarily odd and ill-advised thing to do, especially since Carter himself was inexperienced and generally shared Vance's strategic outlook and goals.

Ball reasoned as follows:

By appointing a national security advisor eager to advance his own views at the expense of the Secretary of State, President Carter showed either his ignorance of recent history or his inability to learn from the mistakes of the past. Only a president who saw his options with clarity and was sufficiently experienced to make his own decisions could prevent the disastrous confusion implicit in that arrangement. Jimmy Carter was not such a president. Had he been, he would never have created such an operational monstrosity in the first place.¹¹⁸

Thus, by granting expansive coordination and control powers to Brzezinski at the inception of the administration and then enhancing these powers over time, Carter ensured that his policymaking process would be divisive, not collegial, and would potentially undermine the supposed authorities he had granted to Cyrus Vance.

In addition to the power inherent in Brzezinski's coordination and control functions and his role as SCC chair, Brzezinski possessed another component of power that Vance and other cabinet officials did not have: the power of proximity, the power of a White House office, the power of being able easily to interact with the president face-to-face. As George Ball observed, "a National Security advisor has the advantage

¹¹⁸ George W. Ball, "Power and Principle," *Political Science Quarterly* 99, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 97.

of briefing the President every morning and can thus exploit the time-tested bureaucratic principle that ‘nothing propinks like propinquity’.”¹¹⁹ According to Hodding Carter III, Brzezinski used this ease of access “in what became a single-minded pursuit of dominance in the foreign policy arena.”¹²⁰ Thus, proximity, coupled with a personal drive to augment power, created a power base for Brzezinski unlike that of any other foreign policy aide. Brzezinski, who saw or spoke to the president several times a day, recognized the power provided by proximity:

Coordination is predominance. I learned that lesson quickly. And the key to asserting effective coordination was the right of direct access to the President, in writing, by telephone, or simply by walking into his office. I was one of three assistants who had such direct access at any time, not subject to anyone’s control...I was determined to maintain an active and personal dialogue.¹²¹

Indeed, when Robert Thompson tabulated the number of meetings officials had with President Carter, Brzezinski alone accounted for more than 20 percent of Carter’s meetings – more than anyone else in the administration.¹²²

In addition to providing the president with information in frequent, daily informal meetings and to coordinating, writing, or editing the formal national security

¹¹⁹ Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 458.

¹²⁰ Hodding Carter III, "Life Inside the Carter State Department -- Memoir," *Playboy*, February 1981, 213.

¹²¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 63.

¹²² Robert J. Thompson, "Contrasting Models of White House Staff Organization," *Congress and the Presidency* 19, no. 2 (Autumn 1992), 122.

reports, Brzezinski gave the President a daily intelligence report, including up to 20 pages of selected information in the morning, and a weekly national security report. Although these reports contained factual information from a variety of sources, they were also highly interpretative. As Brzezinski noted: "I commented in a freewheeling fashion on the Administration's performance."¹²³ Indeed, over time Vance became alarmed by Brzezinski's interpretative cover notes to his reports, and began to discuss "matters with the President privately rather than putting his ideas down on paper so they could be topped by Brzezinski's."¹²⁴

Brzezinski alone among foreign policy advisors knew where the president was at any moment. Whenever Carter changed his location, a machine in Brzezinski's office similar to a small television set would beep and allow Brzezinski to pinpoint the President's location.¹²⁵ The power imbedded in being the one to provide the president with most of his information and knowing where he was at any given time was enormous, but particularly so during times of crisis and times of other officials' inaccessibility. When Cyrus Vance traveled – and he traveled extensively at Carter's behest, Brzezinski controlled the flow of information to an even greater degree. George

¹²³ Ibid., 64.

¹²⁴ "A Surprise at State," *Time Magazine*, May 12, 1980, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,920856..>

¹²⁵ Elizabeth Drew, "A Reporter at Large. Brzezinski," *The New Yorker*, May 1, 1978, 95.

Ball observed, for example, that when Vance and other State Department officials were on a Middle East negotiating trip during Ball's brief advisory assignment on Iran, "Brzezinski was systematically excluding the State Department from the shaping the conduct of our Iranian policy."¹²⁶

In addition to the power Carter had granted to him in the planning system and the power that flowed from well-used proximity to the president, Brzezinski had yet another source of power: his driving ambition to be Carter's chief foreign policy aide as well as a key foreign policy spokesman. Carter appeared to believe that Brzezinski's ambitions were consistent with the "natural competition" between the Department of State and the National Security Council, and would be a positive, productive aspect of his administration.¹²⁷ What Carter may not have fully appreciated -- or thought that he could manage -- was Brzezinski's determination both to define and undermine the rules of that competition. Indeed, Carter's acknowledgement of Brzezinski's love of power and his willingness to exercise it in a highly aggressive manner suggested that he possibly knew what he was getting into in picking Brzezinski as NSC advisor:

...a few of the people who knew him well cautioned me that Zbig was aggressive and ambitious, and that on controversial subjects he might be inclined to speak out too forcefully...an additional note of caution was expressed: Dr. Brzezinski might not be adequately deferential to a secretary of state....Knowing Zbig, I

¹²⁶ Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 458.

¹²⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 57.

realized that some of these assessments were accurate, but they were in accord with what I wanted...¹²⁸

Some officials, however, suggested that “aggressive” and “ambitious” were inadequate descriptors of Brzezinski’s professional behaviors. Hodding Carter III, for example, provided a scathing portrait of Brzezinski’s pursuit of power:

Brzezinski, however, never accepted a defeat as final or a policy as decided if it did not please him. Like a rat terrier, he would shake himself off after a losing encounter and begin nipping at Vance’s ankles, using his press spokesman and chief deputies as well as himself to tell the world that he had won or that only he, Zbigniew Brzezinski, hung tough in the national-security game as a foreign policy realist.¹²⁹

In both the performance of his formal duties as NSC advisor and in his daily activities, Brzezinski engaged in self-promotion, personal manipulation, disparagements of colleagues, and lies about his own actions. Brzezinski’s self-promotion was epitomized in an unusual hire at the inception of the administration: the hiring of Jerrold Schecter as NSC press spokesman. Brzezinski justified this hire as a way “to make certain that that the President’s line on foreign affairs was properly articulated” -- a task that Cyrus Vance assumed belonged to him and the State Department.¹³⁰ Never before had the NSC retained a press spokesman because the NSC advisor was not in the business of being the President’s foreign affairs spokesman. Schecter was not known,

¹²⁸ Ibid., 55.

¹²⁹ Hodding Carter III, "Life Inside the Carter State Department, 214.

¹³⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 77.

however, as the NSC's spokesman; instead, the media saw him as Brzezinski's press assistant. In a concluding review of the Carter administration, *The New York Times*, for example, pointed out that Brzezinski's frequent and forceful contacts with the media made it seem as if there were two secretaries of state. The evidence cited included the fact that Brzezinski "employs his own press secretary, gives public interviews as well as frequent off-the-record briefings and himself receives foreign emissaries."¹³¹

Not only did Brzezinski attempt to manipulate the foreign policymaking process, but he also appeared to manipulate people, including the president. One way to examine how Brzezinski did this is to contrast how Vance and Brzezinski interacted with the president through their memoranda. Selecting a representative memorandum from both individuals is a relatively easy task, because they consistently used the same tone, style, format, and types of content in how they addressed Carter. In one of his first memoranda to Carter during the Carter-Mondale transition planning group meetings in December 1976, Vance referenced Carter's input into an upcoming congressional meeting and Vance's recommendations to him in this way:

I believe that the conference agenda must be rather carefully structured if we are to make good use of your time. In proposing this meeting with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, you spoke of 'a highly organized and careful presentation of the key issues.' Were we to follow this concept literally, the meeting would, in effect, become a day of testimony by your nominees to the Members. Rather than speaking to them – something we will be doing a great deal of the next four years

¹³¹ Editorial, "The War of the State Departments," *The New York Times*, January 5, 1981, <http://selectnytimes.com/search/restricted/article?res=FA0D10FE>.

– I believe we should give them the fullest possible opportunity to tell you what is on their minds.¹³²

The matter-of-fact, direct nature of this memo -- both its content and form -- was vintage Vance. Vance further proposed a simple agenda for the meeting to which Carter assented, and then assured Carter that: “We will also work closely, of course, with Fritz, Zbig, and David Aaron.”¹³³ Similarly, in a January 3, 1979 nightly briefing report to Carter, Vance provided a succinct, direct summary of issues and of his conversations with several senators. For example, the memo alluded to a “highly dangerous suggestion” made by Frank Church about turning military base agreements into treaties, suggested that it would be surprising if Senator Baker honored his pledge to avoid making public his conclusions about SALT after visiting the Soviet Union, mentioned that Senator Edward Kennedy “will continue as a strong ally on China policy,” and briefed the President about the departure of Americans from Iran. Vance did not suggest how Carter should view any of this information. Instead, he provided his perspective in a direct, but even-handed way.¹³⁴

¹³² Cyrus Vance, "Memorandum to the President-elect on Foreign Policy Meeting with Congressional Leaders, Washington, D.C.," Cyrus R. and Grace Sloane Vance Papers, Yale University Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, December, 1976, 2.

¹³³ Ibid., 5.

¹³⁴ Cyrus Vance, “Secretary of State Cyrus Vance Provides Jimmy Carter with his Daily Report, January 3, 1979,” *Declassified Documents Reference System* (Galenet), <http://0-galenet/galegroup.comlibrary.laus.georgetown.edu/servi/>.

In contrast, memoranda prepared by Brzezinski for the President are qualitatively different in tone and content. He appeared to use his memos to heighten his image as an intellectual, to flatter Carter, and sometimes to snipe at his colleagues, particularly Secretary Vance. Brzezinski consistently attempted to convey to Carter that he was a singular intellectual and historical instructor who could give Carter context and perspectives that Carter could then internalize and convey to the American people, Congress, and leaders from other countries. For example, in a January 1980 memo proposing a long-term strategy for addressing the impact of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Brzezinski lectured Carter:

Before outlining for you an agenda of possible responses, let me put the foregoing in a brief historical context, which may also be useful to you when you comment on the subject. We have, in effect, entered the fifth decade in the U.S.-Soviet competition. Each of the decades has had a specific historical character. The 1950's: lines drawn sharply in the West and in the East...The 1980s: the danger of conflict in the context of wider global turbulence. It is both symbolic and significant that the Soviet action in Afghanistan occurred in the first week of the new decade of the 1980s.¹³⁵

In addition to projecting a professorial image in his memos, Brzezinski also used his memos to flatter Carter and to suggest desirable roles for himself. In a February 1979 memo that focused on how to address the negative perceptions of Carter's foreign policymaking system, Brzezinski fawned over Carter, undermined Vance, and advanced

¹³⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Memorandum for the President on the Long-term Strategy for Coping with the Consequences of the Soviet Action in Afghanistan," January 9, 1980, *Declassified Documents Reference System*, (Galenet), <http://0-galenet/galegroup.comlibrary.laus.-georgetown.edu/servi/>.

himself as a person who should have increased responsibilities for Soviet policy. First, he flattered Carter:

You confront a paradox: everyone who has met with you, whether it be mass media, dinner guests or participants in the Congressional foreign policy briefings, afterwards invariably say how immensely impressed they were by your mastery of foreign policy, by your knowledge of details, and by your ability to relate that knowledge to a broad vision. Just last night I was told that Mrs. Reston commented after a dinner with you that she cannot recall any President who could match you in that regard.¹³⁶

Brzezinski further suggested how Carter might deal with the perception of a Brzezinski/Vance split:

I think a genuine problem has been created by the press's fascination, exploitation, and magnification of the so-called Vance-Brzezinski rivalry...it would be very useful if you took some deliberate steps to demonstrate that you are exploiting the differences while pursuing a steady course...One way to achieve that objective would be to use Cy soon and visibly in relationship to China, and to use me in some fashion in relationship to the Soviet Union...¹³⁷

Having put himself forward as a possible emissary or negotiator with the Soviet Union, Brzezinski then took the opportunity to undercut Vance's power as the administration's foreign policy spokesman, as well as Vance's ability to influence Soviet policy:

...it might be useful, and domestically even appealing, to have me spend a couple of days in Moscow in consultation with the Soviets on issues of common concern,

¹³⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Memorandum to the President. Zbigniew Brzezinski Provides President Jimmy Carter with NSC Weekly Report No. 89 Regarding Controversy over Carter's Foreign Policy Leadership, February 24, 1979," *Declassified Documents Reference System (Galenet)*, <http://0-galenet/galegroup.com/library.laus-georgetown.edu/servi/>.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

perhaps with my counterpart who works for Brezhnev....With reference to the latter, I should note that we really have not had sustained and truly tough-minded “consultations” with the Soviets since you took office. Most of Cy’s sessions have been primarily negotiating ones, and I suspect that some of the misunderstandings that exist are due to suspicions that have become more intense.¹³⁸

Finally, implying that Vance had to be encouraged to advocate for Carter’s foreign policy themes because Vance might not share them, Brzezinski suggested that Vance give a foreign policy address that would emphasize:

...some of the themes that you have recently expressed: the importance of power, and our recognition that relations with the Soviet Union may require from time to time a forceful American reaffirmation of our interests (e.g., in relationship to Iran, or peace in the Far East, or the Soviet military buildup).¹³⁹

Thus, in this one memorandum, Brzezinski not only flattered Carter, but also disparaged Vance’s negotiations with the Soviets, implied that Vance was not stressing the same themes that the President was stressing, and suggested that he now should assume the role of envoy to the Soviet Union, because Vance was not “tough-minded” enough.

Vance and Brzezinski operated by strikingly different rules about how they treated colleagues with different approaches to foreign policies. In Vance’s memoirs, he stated that when he had disagreements with the way that Brzezinski interpreted his positions to Carter and others, he directly addressed this with Carter.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, he

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 37.

also took up contentious issues directly with Brzezinski. When Vance learned that Brzezinski had opened up a direct channel to officials in Iran, he met with Carter and him to protest Brzezinski's back-channel activities.¹⁴¹ Brzezinski flatly lied that he had done this, even though the evidence was clear that he had.¹⁴² Vance's behavior in this incident was illustrative of his general approach to resolving issues with Brzezinski. Warren Christopher, Vance's deputy at the State Department, confirmed that Vance did not play bureaucratic Washington games, including criticizing the NSC staff.¹⁴³ Other Vance aides concurred:

Early on, a story appeared in *Time* magazine attacking Brzezinski, with the column ascribed to a State Department official. Vance called in the assistant secretary suspected of the leak and said, 'Did you do it?' The response was yes. 'Don't do it again,' said the Secretary. 'That's the wrong way. It will only spread the poison and make it worse. I'll take the issues up with the President. But I'm not going to talk to him about Zbig or any bureaucratic nonsense. I'll talk to him about the issues. That's the way to do it.'¹⁴⁴

Brzezinski's professional behavior, on the other hand, was often the antithesis of Vance's straightforward way of addressing contentious issues in Carter's planning

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 328.

¹⁴² Among those confirming Brzezinski's ties to Ambassador Ardeshir Zahedi were George Ball and William Sullivan. See Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 458 and William H. Sullivan, *Mission to Iran* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), 181.

¹⁴³ Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, 88.

¹⁴⁴ Destler, Gelb, and Lake, *Our Own Worst Enemy*, 96.

system. That is not, however, how Brzezinski portrayed himself. From the time he assumed his position and publicly discussed his authority and behavior, to the time he recorded his recollections in his post-administration memoirs, interviews, and oral histories, Brzezinski steadfastly maintained that he acted as an honest broker and that he did not make underhanded comments about the State Department staff, either privately or through leaks. In a memo to Carter that addressed the negative perceptions of the divisiveness in Carter's foreign policymaking team, Brzezinski clarified that "there has been no underhanded maneuvering to have one's point of view prevail."¹⁴⁵ In his memoirs, Brzezinski took the position that he had been maligned by Vance's "immediate subordinates" who "deliberately fed the press stories designed to present me in a very unfavorable light. They caricatured me personally as well as my views."¹⁴⁶ He furthermore criticized Vance for not being an honest broker and for not restraining the Department of State officials who were critical of his positions: "I often wondered why Cy could not put a stop to that sniping."¹⁴⁷

The evidence does not support Brzezinski's self-portrayal. State Department officials, representatives of the media, Brzezinski's staff, and Brzezinski's words in declassified memoranda have confirmed that Brzezinski sniped, battled, leaked, and

¹⁴⁵ Brzezinski, "Memorandum for the President," NSC Weekly Report #89, 2.

¹⁴⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 40.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

undermined other high-level government officials who competed with him for influence with Carter. On the issue of the troublesome leaking in the Carter administration, a leaking that both NSC and State Department officials engaged in, Hodding Carter and other senior State Department officials such as Harold Saunders maintained that Brzezinski did most of the leaking -- “well-placed leaks to major columnists and newspapers.”¹⁴⁸ Brzezinski did not just leak information to bolster his issue positions or his status. He also misrepresented other officials’ positions with Carter. Vance noted that when he reviewed Brzezinski’s memos to the President he “found discrepancies, occasionally serious ones, from my own recollection of what had been said, agreed, or recommended. This meant that I had to go back to the president to clarify my views and to get the matter straightened out.”¹⁴⁹ Even NSC staffers suggested that Brzezinski “misrepresented to the President the positions that Mr. Vance had taken at meetings” by covering Vance’s memos to the president with his own memos and comments which contained “distortions of Mr. Vance’s position.”¹⁵⁰

Brzezinski’s undermining of Vance went beyond written distortions of Vance’s positions to blocking Vance’s input into critical decisions. As Warren Christopher and

¹⁴⁸ See Carter III, “Life Inside the Carter State Department,” 214, and Saunders, “Interview with the Author,” January 22, 2002.

¹⁴⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 37.

¹⁵⁰ Gelb, “Vance -- Torn by Ideals and by Loyalty to Carter.”

others observed, Brzezinski's actions prior to the president's announcement of the normalization of relations with China indicated that Brzezinski deliberately prevented Vance, Christopher, and Richard Holbrooke from having input into Carter's decision about the timing of the announcement. Not only did this action undermine Vance's authority, but it also had negative ramifications for SALT negotiations and Congressional relations.¹⁵¹

Brzezinski's willingness to undermine actively the influence of the State Department was emulated by his staff. William Odom, who was Brzezinski's military assistant and crisis coordinator on the NSC staff, acknowledged that he aggressively, relentlessly pushed Brzezinski's views.

I did not intend to get into the confrontation roles that I was sometimes placed in. I saw very quickly that Brzezinski was pleased that I was willing to go out and beat the bushes about a policy and really make some people nervous about it, and yet, give him plausible deniability of holding my view. I had to make a judgment on how far I could go without getting in trouble on that, where he would have to abandon me.¹⁵²

Other NSC staff likewise dedicated themselves to bolstering Brzezinski's authority at Vance's expense, as shown in a memo from Michel Oksenberg and William Odom to Brzezinski regarding the Sino Vietnamese conflict:

¹⁵¹ Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, 90-91.

¹⁵² William Odom, "Carter Presidency Project. Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, Madeleine K. Albright, Leslie G. Denend, William Odom, February 18, 1982," *The Miller Center*.

Your bureaucratic objective here is to make sure that Cy is not in charge of this arena. We want to make sure that our U.N position is exactly in line with our first policy objective of obtaining the withdrawal of both Chinese and Vietnamese forces.¹⁵³

Not only did Brzezinski's staffers clearly seek to limit Vance's authority, but they also implied that the NSC, not the Department of State, was the true purveyor of Carter administration policy. Their message, consistent with Brzezinski's views, was that the Department of State and Cyrus Vance could not be trusted, and left to their own devices, they might support a policy that would "expose the President's China policy as vacillating and inconsistent and having suffered a setback."¹⁵⁴

Brzezinski's narrative of his exercise of power and principles revealed that no person was beyond meriting a sharp attack. In addition to attacking Carter for being "peevisish," he portrayed Walter Mondale as insecure, and accused Secretary of Defense Harold Brown of being ambivalent about strategy.¹⁵⁵ His damning characterization of Vance indicated that he believed that Vance was not his intellectual equal.

Emphasizing that he did not consider Vance to be a strategic thinker, Brzezinski suggested that Vance's previous success on Wall Street reflected that he was

¹⁵³ Michel Oksenberg and William Odom, "Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski on the Objectives for Today's SCC Meeting on the Sino-Vietnamese Conflict, February 10, 1979," *Declassified Documents Reference System*, <http://0-galenet.galegroup.com.library.lausys.georgetown.edu/serv1>.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 19, 34, 47.

“methodical and congenial,” but that he did not have the background to be a successful secretary of state.¹⁵⁶

Finally, in a memorandum that Brzezinski wrote to Carter soon after Vance’s resignation about the foreign policy team inherited by the new secretary of state, Edmund Muskie, he revealed the full extent of his willingness and ability to engage in aggressive attacks to bolster his power in the planning system. The fact that he was comfortable doing so signified that Carter was not only amenable to entertaining these views, but had certainly been conscious of the nature of the power struggle between his two aides. In this memo, Brzezinski offered trenchant criticisms of Vance and his team – precisely the type of criticism that he said he never engaged in:

It is particularly important in this context that the new Secretary speak often to the American public and convey to it a strong case on behalf of your policies. Cy never did it.... and the people around Cy continuously conspired either to dilute your policy or to divert it into directions more to their own liking. The so-called zigzags in our past policies have been more apparent than real and have been exaggerated by an absence of a strong public voice by the Secretary and by leaks and a lack of discipline in the State Department ranks.¹⁵⁷

Brzezinski then proceeded to provide highly negative critiques of Vance’s staff, including “second echelon people” with “excessively dovish sentiments.”¹⁵⁸ He pointed

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 43.

¹⁵⁷ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Memorandum to the President on Unity and the New Foreign Policy Team, May 1, 1980," *Declassified Documents Reference System* (*Galenet*), <http://0-galenet.galegroup.com.library.lausys.georgetown.edu/serv>.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

out that although David Newsom has been loyal and helpful,” “he is not forceful and has stumbled in public on a couple of occasions.”¹⁵⁹ He deemed Executive Secretary Peter Tarnoff to be “a bureaucratic manipulator,” to have “an intense loyalty to the former Secretary as well as to the State Department’s prerogatives,” and further clarified that his “loyalty to the department comes before his loyalty to you or your policies. He is not entirely trustworthy.”¹⁶⁰ He maintained that Ben Read, Under Secretary for Management, had “pursued some senseless policies,” and was “implacably hostile to any intelligence activities and a major impediment to cooperation between the State Department and CIA.”¹⁶¹ Finally, he more benignly observed that Tony Lake, Director of the Policy Planning Staff, was “loyal and supportive...quite close to Senator Muskie....a dove, but not a doctrinaire one.”¹⁶² Most significantly, as part of offering these unsolicited views to Carter, Brzezinski also communicated his ultimate message: “I would like to be able to increase slightly some of the quiet consultative contacts with foreign governments which are necessary to give them

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

needed insights into our strategic thinking, while confirming the fact that we are operating as a team.”¹⁶³

Brzezinski’s unflinching pursuit of power -- a pursuit that Vance fought and Carter limited only occasionally -- resulted in Brzezinski having a particular type of power: the power to create and maintain conflict. The impact on Vance of Brzezinski’s tactics and the impact of Carter’s decisions not to restrain Brzezinski adequately cannot be underestimated. People close to Vance acknowledged that dealing with Brzezinski posed two significant difficulties for Vance: first, Vance had to be ever vigilant to preserve his and supposedly Carter’s view of desirable Soviet-American relations; and second, the battle with Brzezinski for the ear of Jimmy Carter was personally taxing, troubling, and enervating.¹⁶⁴ Whether or not Vance shared the views of those close to him that Brzezinski was “that awful man” is not known,¹⁶⁵ but he was disturbed, demoralized and deeply angered by Brzezinski’s professional behavior, and believed

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Vance’s wife Grace confirmed that the battle with Brzezinski was exhausting and dispiriting. See interview by author, April 10, 2001.

¹⁶⁵ In Mrs. Vance’s interview with the author, she did not mince words about what she thought of Brzezinski. She clarified that Vance expected people to operate by a decent code of behavior and that Brzezinski consistently violated it -- thus her characterization of him as “that awful man.”

that Brzezinski's tactics were "a serious impediment to the conduct of our foreign policy."¹⁶⁶

In sum, the nature of Brzezinski's power within the Carter foreign policymaking system -- the expansive coordination and control authorities granted by Carter in his first presidential directives, the power that flowed from proximity to the president, and the power Brzezinski achieved through the relentless pursuit of additional influence -- ensured that Carter's system would not be collegial, undermined the administration's ability to develop and implement consistent policies, and guaranteed that Vance would engage, in a very different way, in his own battle for influence. As logical as it may seem to cast this as a Vance-Brzezinski battle, it is important to recognize that Jimmy Carter was ultimately responsible for the nature of his policymaking system and for the decisions made about who would frame and articulate U.S. foreign policies.

A Significant Departure from Carter's Planning System

A final way to assess the impact of structure, process, and people on Carter's foreign policy decisions is to examine the decisions and actions that occurred when Carter briefly employed a different planning process. Ironically, Jimmy Carter produced his greatest foreign policy success -- the Camp David Accords -- when he

¹⁶⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 34.

departed from his foreign policy planning process, when he relied upon the best aspects of his and Cyrus Vance's leadership, and when he marginalized the influence of Brzezinski. On September 17, 1978, Carter announced that after 12 days of meetings and negotiations at Camp David, Anwar al-Sadat, president of Egypt, and Menachem Begin, Israeli prime minister, had agreed on a framework for peace in the Middle East and a framework for the conclusion of a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.¹⁶⁷ The contributions of Carter and Vance in achieving these accords were so evident and compelling that even Brzezinski acknowledged:

...the outcome was a triumph of Carter's determined mastery of enormous detail and of his perseverance in sometimes angry and always complex negotiations. He showed himself to be a skillful debater, a master psychologist, and a very effective mediator. Without him, there would have been no agreement. Credit secondarily must go to Vance, and I felt strongly at the time that the press did not give him sufficient accolades for his contribution. He was tireless in seeking compromises and persistent in pressing the two sides to accommodate. He was able to match the Israelis in esoteric legal argumentation, and his mastery of the problem at hand was peerless. My own role was quite limited.¹⁶⁸

The process that produced the Camp David Accords differed from Jimmy Carter's normal foreign policymaking apparatus. The most striking difference was that the Camp David decisionmaking process was indeed collegial, focused, goal-driven, and managed to a significant degree by Cyrus Vance. The result: Jimmy Carter was

¹⁶⁷ Jimmy Carter, "Camp David Meeting on the Middle East Documents Agreed to at Camp David, September 17, 1978," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=29788>.

¹⁶⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principles*, 273.

free to use the knowledge he had gained from in-depth preparation, his single-minded energy, his reputation for honesty, and his negotiating skill to drive Sadat and Begin to reach an historic agreement. In brief, Carter was in charge, but Vance was his chief lieutenant in every respect. Harold Saunders, director of the State Department's intelligence and research at the time of Camp David, emphasized that Camp David represented the way government should work -- professionals working together for a common goal.¹⁶⁹

What were the key elements of the Camp David process?

First, Jimmy Carter received Vance-directed staff support that allowed him to tap his strengths and achieve his objectives. Jack Watson, Carter's cabinet secretary, emphasized that it was impossible to overstate the critical importance of Carter's role and contribution:

I asked myself at the time that Carter took Begin and Sadat up to Camp David and pulled off the Camp David Accords, 'Is there anybody else in all of American politics currently who could have done that?' My own answer to that question was, 'No, there's not.' It was possible for the President to achieve what he did only by virtue of his thoroughly studied homework. Camp David was a product of how thoroughly he understood all the elements of the Middle Eastern problem

¹⁶⁹ Harold Saunders, in his interview with the author, became emotional when he discussed the camaraderie of the Camp David experience and the effectiveness of the process. He credited Vance for both. See Saunders, Interview with Author, January 22, 2002.

down to the last comma and period. Carter's incredible perseverance and his taking the political risk in the first place eventually prevailed.¹⁷⁰

Second, Carter's close association with Vance at Camp David sharpened his knowledge and performance, as well as his high regard for Vance. *The Los Angeles Times* quoted an official who watched Carter and Vance work closely together during thirteen days of negotiations:

At Camp David, the President for the first time got into that process on a daily basis. In effect, they were only doing what lawyers do all the time: a lot of detail work, drafting, close negotiating away from the public eye. The relationship was strengthened by the fact of their having gone through a problem-solving exercise together. Vance found it enriching, working on a negotiation like that day after day. He felt he was in his element, exercising his strength, engaged in the process in which he excels.¹⁷¹

William Quandt, a participant in the process from Brzezinski's staff, affirmed the dominant role of Vance when he observed that the "Camp David negotiations involved the president and his secretary of state to an almost unprecedented degree."¹⁷² Quandt further emphasized that "Carter was also ably served by his secretary of state, Cyrus

¹⁷⁰ Watson, "Carter Presidency Project, Interview with Jack Watson, April 17, 1981," *Miller Center*.

¹⁷¹ Oswald Johnston, "Vance: Single Voice for U.S. Foreign Policy," *The Los Angeles Times*, November 19, 1978, sec. A, p. 17.

¹⁷² William B. Quandt, "Camp David and Peacemaking in the Middle East," *Political Science Quarterly* 101, no. 3 (1986): 360.

Vance, who deserves much of the credit for patiently shaping the Camp David Accords.”¹⁷³

Third, Vance not only was a key player in the political team at Camp David, but he also directed the work of a high-quality support staff with representatives both from the State Department and the NSC.¹⁷⁴ Vance tasked this group with generating information, ideas, and negotiating positions. The quality of this combined staff and the quality of their work were exceptional. In addition to the U.S. ambassadors to Israel and Egypt, Vance’s group of experts included: Roy Atherton and Hal Saunders from the State Department whom Vance described as “two extraordinarily able diplomats” who “possessed unparalleled understanding of Arab-Israeli issues, each of them having been involved with Arab-Israeli problems for over fifteen years,” Anthony Lake, “the brilliant and invaluable director of policy planning in the State Department,” and William Quandt, the middle eastern expert from Brzezinski’s NSC staff, who Vance described as “gifted and imaginative” and dedicated to working “in total harmony with his State Department counterparts.”¹⁷⁵ And the group indeed worked in harmony. Vance proudly highlighted:

¹⁷³ Ibid., 361.

¹⁷⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 219.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 165.

...our preparation for Camp David was thorough. The staff work was first class. We all did our homework before it started. We discussed among ourselves what our objectives were and knew where we wanted to come out. So when we went there, it was with confidence that we would succeed.¹⁷⁶

At the conclusion of the Camp David process, Carter appeared to recognize not only that he had achieved a critical success, but also that Vance's management of much of the process and his negotiating contributions had been key inputs into this major accomplishment. When Carter spoke to a joint session of Congress on September 18, 1978, he explained that he was sending Vance to explain the terms of the Camp David Agreement to the kings of Jordan and Saudi Arabia because "This is an important mission, and this responsibility, I can tell you, based on my last two weeks with him, could not possibly rest on the shoulders of a more able and dedicated and competent man than Secretary Cyrus Vance."¹⁷⁷ After the Camp David success, Vance and his State Department staff believed that "the testing period is over....things are going to work out after all. The secretary of state is now indisputably the man who speaks for the United States in its dealings with the rest of the world."¹⁷⁸ An observer of the administration confirmed that "Vance right now has considerable personal influence to

¹⁷⁶ Johnston, "Vance: Single Voice for U.S. Foreign Policy," p. 17.

¹⁷⁷ Jimmy Carter, "Camp David Meeting on the Middle East Address before a Joint Session of the Congress, September 18, 1978," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print/php?pid=29799>.

¹⁷⁸ Johnston, "Vance: Single Voice for U.S. Foreign Policy," 16.

offset the basic institutional influence of the NSC. That's the way he works. He seeks influence by seeming not to seek it. He does his job.”¹⁷⁹

This euphoria over Carter's and Vance's accomplishments -- and Vance's status as the primary foreign policy aide and spokesman -- were short-lived. Almost immediately after Camp David, Carter returned to a policy planning process that allowed Brzezinski to wield substantial power and to create conflict.¹⁸⁰ The tragic irony for the Carter administration is that Carter achieved his greatest success – the Camp David Accords – when he relied heavily on the expertise and organizational talents of Cyrus Vance, and encountered his greatest failure – the hostage rescue mission – when he relied on the analysis and recommendations of Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Conclusions

Four critical decisions Jimmy Carter made regarding the foreign policymaking apparatus created important roots of Cyrus Vance's battle for principle and power. First, Carter placed himself at the center of a highly competitive foreign policymaking system and attempted to operate as its chief manager, chief analyst, and chief

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁸⁰ In fact, the November 19, 1978 *Los Angeles Times* article referenced above pointed out that in November, Brzezinski's staff was leaking information about how he had prevailed at a White House meeting on Iran over the views of State Department human-rights activists, and further explained that Vance had to issue a clarifying statement concerning the Shah of Iran on the next day. See page 17 of the article.

coordinator. This decision was consistent with Carter's view of his leadership. Second, Carter appointed as his key advisors two individuals who had substantially different world views and different codes of behavior – again, a decision consistent with his view of his leadership capabilities. Third, Carter implemented a policymaking system that tilted power to Brzezinski, and restrained the authority of his secretary of state. And finally, as his administration progressed, Carter allowed and encouraged Brzezinski to assume policymaking roles appropriate to the secretary of state.

CHAPTER 4. SOVIET POLICY: THE ROOT OF ALL CONFLICTS

When Cyrus Vance resigned as a matter of principle after President Carter decided to undertake a military operation to rescue the U.S. hostages in Iran, Carter's action was "all by itself...the cause of his (Vance's) quitting."¹ And yet, Carter's decision was not an aberration in the Carter-Vance relationship. Cyrus Vance fought many policy battles during his tenure as secretary of state, but no battle was more critical, more all-encompassing, and more enduring than Vance's struggle to hold Jimmy Carter to the policies he believed they had embraced regarding the Soviet Union at the beginning of the administration. Furthermore, no bureaucratic battle was more debilitating to the administration than the battle that Carter permitted between Brzezinski and Vance for institutional control of the major Soviet-related issues: human rights and arms control. One word encapsulated the differences in the secretary of state's and the NSC advisor's world views: linkage. In spite of Vance's belief that they shared the same approach to Soviet policy, Carter had not firmly settled upon whether or not the U.S. relationship to the Soviet Union, particularly regarding strategic arms control, should be linked to Soviet actions affecting human rights and Soviet

¹ Strobe Talbott, "Departure of a Good Soldier," *Time*, May 12, 1980, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,920861,00.html>.

attempts to extend its military and political influence abroad. In general, Brzezinski embraced linkage, and in general, Vance did not. Jimmy Carter's "failure to develop and articulate a consistent approach to relations with the Soviet Union"² assured that his policymaking process would be contentious. Carter's initial lack of clarity about human rights, his decision to propose deep cuts in Soviet and U.S. nuclear arsenals, and his intimations that linkages between arms control and certain Soviet behaviors might exist ensured that Vance would need to engage in a struggle for principle and bureaucratic power. Even though Carter and Brzezinski acknowledged during these formative months of the administration that Vance was Carter's primary foreign policy advisor, Brzezinski began asserting himself as early as the spring of 1977 by contradicting Vance in both subtle and direct ways and by attempting to shape Carter's definition of the nature of Soviet power.

Disparate Views of Soviet Power

Jimmy Carter entered office in January 1977 without a detailed strategy for engaging the Soviet Union, but with a high degree of confidence that he could be the chief analyst, architect, and manager of U.S. foreign policy. Brzezinski observed that "Carter would be the first to admit that he came to the White House without a detailed

² Anthony Lewis, "What the Captain Means," *The New York Times*, May 15, 1980, sec. A, p. 27.

plan for managing U.S.-Soviet relations.”³ Carter’s lack of a strategic view or plan, however, did not dissuade him during his first months in office from rebuking Soviet leadership about human rights violations, and at the same time assuming that he could persuade Soviet leaders to accept “simple, careful, and firm proposals” aimed at eliminating the “nuclear weapon capability among all nations.”⁴ Even six months into his administration, after the Soviet Union had summarily rejected his proposal for deep cuts in nuclear weaponry and protested what it believed was Carter’s interference in its internal affairs regarding human rights, Carter expressed his strategy for dealing with the Soviet Union in an exceptionally general, non strategic way as he called for:

...increased friendship with the Soviet Union, a reduction in nuclear weaponry, and easing of the tensions between ourselves and the Soviets through quiet diplomatic channels, with myself talking to the Soviet Ambassador, with Cy Vance, the Secretary of State, going to Moscow...I believe that calm and persistent and fair negotiations with the Soviet Union will ultimately lead to increased relations with them.⁵

As Carter continued with his presidency, he did not explicitly, consistently address the fundamental question about Soviet power that both Vance and Brzezinski posed but answered in substantively different ways: was the Soviet Union committed to a master plan for world domination” or was it engaged in an “unceasing probing for

³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 147.

⁴ Carter, *Why Not the Best?*, 178.

⁵ Jimmy Carter, "The President's News Conference of July 12, 1977," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/we/print/php/pid=7786>.

advantage in furthering its national interests.”⁶ Indeed, Paul Warnke, whom Carter appointed chief SALT negotiator and Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, emphasized that Jimmy Carter never “officially or informally” clarified his views about Soviet power.⁷

Cyrus Vance’s views about Soviet power, in part formed from his extensive management and analytical experience in the Defense Department and his previous relationships with Soviet officials, were clear, nuanced, and tied to what he perceived as U.S. interests. These views displayed little ideological flavor. Vance did not believe that the Soviet Union had a master plan for world domination, but that it “would continue to try to expand its influence when possible. Competition was, and would continue to be, the principal feature of the relationship. Our task was to regulate it.”⁸ Vance believed the management of the U.S.-Soviet relationship required at a minimum four things: the U.S. needed to be clear about what constituted vital national interests; the U.S. needed to maintain its military strength so that it could not only defend itself but also deter aggression; the U.S. should “strive to reduce the swings in mood and attitude that had made a consistent policy difficult in the past;” and the U.S. should not

⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 23.

⁷ Paul C. Warnke, “Oral History of Paul C. Warnke -- Fifth Interview, April 3, 2001,” *Oral History Project. The Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit Court*, <http://www.presidencyucsb.edu/ws/print.php/pid=7786>.

⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 28.

allow Soviet issues to “so dominate our foreign policy that we neglect other important relationships and problems,” such as the needs of Third World nations.⁹

At every opportunity, Vance emphasized that linkage was incompatible with effective regulation of the U.S.-Soviet relationship. Vance believed that:

There existed areas, especially in nuclear arms control, where cooperation with the Soviet Union was possible because our interests coincided with theirs. When cooperation could enhance our security, as in limiting the nuclear arms race, it should be pursued without attempting to link it to other issues.¹⁰

According to Vance, linkage erroneously assumed that the U.S. government could control Soviet behavior by threatening retaliation for human rights abuses, or by tying critical arms control agreements to the Soviet probing for influence in the Horn of Africa.¹¹ He also feared that linkage could be used counterproductively to develop U.S. policies toward China that would taunt the Soviet Union. Essentially, Vance was convinced that linkage restricted U.S. flexibility rather enhanced U.S. security and control, and reduced other countries to pawns in a U.S.-Soviet game.¹² Vance’s view of linkage, therefore, departed from former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s belief that “the efficiency of arms control...could be greatly helped by the introduction of

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. 441.

¹¹ Ibid., 75.

¹² Ibid., 110-111.

linkages between progress in arms control and Soviet restraint in other foreign policy areas.”¹³

The substance and tenor of Vance’s views of Soviet power were well known to Carter and to Brzezinski at the inception of the administration. In fact, Vance clearly highlighted his differences with Brzezinski about détente and linkage in comments he provided to Brzezinski concerning a campaign policy paper in which Brzezinski called for a détente involving “full reciprocity”:

I don’t think it is realistic to believe that we are going to be able to get full reciprocity, and I think we must face that fact. I recognize that the drawing of the guidelines for reciprocity is very difficult, but we should not kid ourselves into believing that we are going to be able to get ‘full reciprocity’We can and should make clear what our views on emigration are, but not engraft them on trade legislation.¹⁴

Vance continued to raise the issue of linkage during the presidential campaign so that Carter would understand the inadvisability of tying strategic arms reductions that were clearly in the national interest to Soviet competitive behaviors. Vance emphasized that the Nixon/Ford administrations had misled the country on the nature and meaning of détente and on the potential for policy linkages. He charged that the previous

¹³ Olav Njølstad, "Keys of Keys?," in *The Fall of Detente. Soviet-American Relations during the Carter Years. Nobel Symposium 95*, ed. Westad, Odd Arne (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997), 53.

¹⁴ Cyrus R. Vance, "Letter from Cyrus R. Vance to Zbigniew Brzezinski" (New Haven, Connecticut: Cyrus R. and Grace Sloane Vance Papers, Yale University Library, Yale University, August 11, 1976, photocopied).

administrations “implied that because agreements were reached in strategic arms reduction, the Soviets would not compete with the United States in other areas. This was untrue.”¹⁵ Pointing out that the Soviets had repeatedly shown that they would compete politically throughout the world, such as in Angola and in the Middle East, Vance stressed that the “American people should have been told the hard truth” about détente because they “are prepared to accept it.”¹⁶ Again, Vance was committed to the idea that détente offered compelling benefits to the American people, even if it did not eliminate Soviet political competition throughout the world, and stressed that “the need to temper political and military competition between the two countries stemmed from our mutual interest in avoiding nuclear war, not from weakness on our part or a willingness to compromise our values.”¹⁷

Thus, when Jimmy Carter chose Vance to be secretary of state, he selected someone who not only held a well-defined view of Soviet power, but also someone who aggressively articulated this view. Brzezinski, however, also had a well-defined view of Soviet power, albeit one that was fundamentally different from Vance’s, and he was equally, if not even more aggressive, in attempting to persuade Carter to adopt his world

¹⁵ Larry Hargrove, "Memorandum for Mr. Eizenstat and Mr. Holbrooke" (New Haven, Connecticut: Cyrus R. and Grace Sloane Vance Papers, Yale University Library, August 29, 1976, photocopied).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 28.

view. Essentially, Brzezinski believed that Vance was “over optimistic on our relations with the Soviets,” and “less than suited for shaping a foreign policy in an age that has become both ideological and revolutionary.”¹⁸ Concerned that “accommodation with the Soviets required us to engage them in a historical-philosophical dialogue about the current state of the world,” Brzezinski criticized Vance for not viewing the Soviet Union as a revolutionary power that was committed to transforming the world and to “global preeminence.”¹⁹ Although both Vance and Brzezinski argued for strategic arms control and a new SALT agreement, Brzezinski, who “harbored a deep distrust of Soviet Russia” as a Polish immigrant,²⁰ suggested that “Vance hoped that a new SALT agreement would pave the way for a wider U.S.-Soviet accommodation, while I saw in it an opportunity to halt or reduce the momentum of the Soviet military buildup.”²¹ In contrast to Vance’s argument that one needed to exercise caution in discussing détente as comprehensive and reciprocal, Brzezinski vigorously maintained that “détente

¹⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 37, 43.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 43, 29, 148.

²⁰ Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind. The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 261.

²¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 146.

inevitably had to involve both cooperation and competition and that it had to be both more *comprehensive* and more *reciprocal*.”²²

Brzezinski also argued against Vance’s position that linkages should not necessarily exist between strategic arms policies and policies regarding human rights, trade, and other exchanges. In a memorandum to Carter prior to the inauguration, Brzezinski contended that linkages must exist, stressed the need for “precise rules of reciprocal restraint,” and called for developing a relationship with the Soviet Union “that is simultaneously cooperative in some respects and yet basically competitive.”²³ Suggesting that the Soviet Union was a revolutionary power committed to world domination, Brzezinski pointed out that not only had the Soviet Union attempted “to exploit international turbulence to promote its political influence, whether through direct action (as in Angola) or simply through obstruction of Western efforts to promote international cooperation,” but also that it had engaged in “sustained efforts to develop the Soviet military potential, combining a capability for long-range conventional action with a seeming effort to acquire a strategic war-fighting capacity.”²⁴ Brzezinski then called for widening the scope of détente from an arms stabilization and reduction

²² Ibid., 147.

²³ Zbigniew Brzezinski, Richard Gardner, and Henry Owen, “Memorandum to Governor Carter” (New Haven, Ct: Cyrus R. and Grace Sloane Vance Papers, Yale University Library, Yale University, November 3, 1976, (photocopied), 2, 8.)

²⁴ Ibid.

program between the superpowers to include a “more comprehensive understanding regarding contentious regional issues,” and “more precise rules of mutual restraint in areas not yet exposed to direct American-Soviet competition or military presence.”²⁵

In selecting Brzezinski to be national security advisor and Vance to be his secretary of state, Carter determined that his administration would not speak with one voice about Soviet power unless he, Carter, ensured that one voice would prevail. Even though Carter appeared to share Vance’s view of Soviet power at the beginning of his administration, he was never totally committed to Vance’s definition of the U.S.-Soviet relationship.²⁶ Moreover, while Carter periodically stated that he did not support linkage, his statements regarding human rights and arms control often undermined these anti-linkage statements. Carter’s lack of clarity and vacillations about Soviet policy during the first year of his administration signified that Vance’s influence and authority were vulnerable.

Human Rights Intersects Soviet Policy

Jimmy Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Cyrus Vance shared a belief that the United States government should promote human rights at home and abroad. However,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Vance, however, firmly believed that he and Carter had no “significant disagreement” about Soviet policy or any other major foreign policy. See pages 31-33 of *Hard Choices*.

the president and his two foreign policy advisors did not agree on how that commitment to human rights should be expressed and the degree to which it should affect U.S. relationships with other countries – and particularly with the Soviet Union. Indeed, as Gaddis Smith has documented, there was a “cacophony of voices arguing about human rights” within the Carter administration.²⁷ The multiplicity of views was not surprising, because as Ambassador Donald F. McHenry observed:

It’s always a very difficult question, this whole question of human rights, because it stands right at the nexus, if you will, between standing for a universal principle and getting involved in somebody else’s business, marching across the line to internal affairs or sovereignty....I do believe that, as in many administrations, the enunciation of a policy and the development of the specific tools and procedures to carry it out are two very different things.²⁸

Jimmy Carter, who “saw the world through human rights lenses,”²⁹ believed that his commitment to human rights policy was clear, understandable, and of critical importance, and underscored this in his inaugural address:

Our commitment to human rights must be absolute...the world itself is now dominated by a new spirit. Peoples more numerous and more politically aware are craving, and now demanding, their place in the sun -- not just for the benefit of their own physical condition, but for basic human rights. The passion for freedom is on the rise. Tapping this new spirit, there can be no nobler nor more

²⁷Smith, *Morality, Reason and Power*, 52.

²⁸ Donald F. McHenry, "Interview with Ambassador Donald F. McHenry, March 23, 1993," Interview by Charles Stuart Kennedy, *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, CD-ROM.

²⁹ Saunders, Interview with Author, January 22, 2002.

ambitious task for America to undertake on this day of a new beginning than to help shape a just and peaceful world that is truly humane.³⁰

Carter further declared that this focus on human rights, which was laudable and consistent with the nation's "moral sense," dictated "a clear-cut preference for those societies which share with us an abiding respect for individual human rights."³¹

Carter's rhetoric triggered a fundamental policy and strategic question: how would the Carter administration achieve this absolute commitment? In assessing Carter's rhetoric, Gaddis Smith expanded upon Ambassador McHenry's observation about the difficulties inherent in a human rights policy:

It was not easy to translate that commitment into specific effective action in foreign policy. The insoluble philosophical problem was that foreign policy by its nature required that every move must be justified in terms of national advantage. In a sinful world, no leader could endanger the survival of the nation by blind adherence to an absolute moral standard.³²

As Carter assumed the presidency, he did not specifically address the difficulties posed by his commitment to an absolutistic human rights policy, nor did he discuss whether and how he might set priorities. Instead, he called attention to the inspirational value of human rights and his staff's uniform support of his position:

³⁰ Carter, "Inaugural Address of President Jimmy Carter, January 20, 1977."

³¹ Ibid.

³² Smith, *Morality, Reason and Power*, 50.

Judging from news articles and direct communications from the American people to me during the first few months of my administration, human rights had become the central theme of our foreign policy in the minds of the press and public. It seemed that a spark had been ignited, and I had no inclination to douse the growing flames. Although it was apparent that it would be difficult to translate a general theory into uniform bureaucratic action, there were no dissenting voices among my top advisors in the White House or the State Department concerning our promotion of human rights.³³

Carter's Human Rights Inheritance

Although Carter accented the inspirational value of human rights as a new focus for the country, it was not new. As Gaddis Smith and others have clarified, “an articulate and effective human-rights lobby already existed in Congress,” and had “secured passage of the 1976 law declaring that it was a principal goal of the foreign policy of the United States to promote the increased observance of internationally recognized human rights by all countries...Carter joined the crusade and made it his own.”³⁴ Nevertheless, the fact that many groups and political leaders had human rights agendas often complicated rather than supported the development and execution of Carter's policy. As David Newsom explained, the Carter administration needed to

³³ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 149.

³⁴ Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 50.

comply with eleven pieces of legislation that required assessing the human rights implications of various government actions.³⁵

The Carter administration and 35 signatory nations were also bound by the Helsinki Accords of 1975, which were produced by the 1972-1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The Helsinki Accords recognized the borders in Europe as defined at the end of World War II and in addition stipulated respect for human rights. The Helsinki Accords would provide a justification for the United States and other countries to express their concerns to the Soviet Union about the treatment of Soviet dissidents and the restrictions on the rights of Soviet Jews to emigrate.³⁶ The Soviet Union had chafed at the demands of the human rights principles specified in Basket Three of the Helsinki Agreement, with Soviet chair Leonid Brezhnev expressing his concern that Helsinki would be used as “a cover for interference in the internal affairs of the countries of socialism, for anti-Communist and anti-Soviet demagogy in the style of the ‘cold war’.”³⁷ Nevertheless, the Soviet Union signed the Helsinki treaty because its government believed that the provisions regarding

³⁵ David D. Newsom, "Interview with Ambassador David D. Newsom, June 17, 1991," Interview by Charles Stuart Kennedy, *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, CD-Rom* (1998).

³⁶ Helsinki Accords, *Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe*, [http://csce.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=About Commission/](http://csce.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=About+Commission/).

³⁷ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 531.

the recognition of the postwar European boundaries “would amount to a major political and propaganda victory for Moscow, and would also “open up prospects for economic cooperation with the West.”³⁸ Furthermore, in his arguments for acceptance of the Helsinki treaty before the Politburo, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko underlined that the human rights commitments “would still be up to the Soviet government, and it alone would decide what did and did not constitute interference in our domestic affairs.”³⁹ Thus, as pointed out by Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, “the Politburo’s acceptance of the Helsinki humanitarian principles implied some noncompliance.”⁴⁰ The United States government was prepared to monitor this noncompliance. During the last year of the Ford administration, the Congress, with support from those in favor of détente and from opponents of détente who wanted to use the Helsinki agreement to “prod the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies on human rights and other issues,” created a Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe to monitor “the actions of CSCE participations on “compliance with or violations” of the Helsinki provisions.”⁴¹ The Carter administration would be able to use

³⁸ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 346.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 532.

this Commission as a key vehicle in its “diplomatic offensive on the human rights issue.”⁴²

Disputes over Human Rights and Linkage

Carter not only had to contend with the different positions advanced by human rights interests groups, but he also needed to deal with the fact that Vance and Brzezinski argued for different approaches to human rights issues, in part explained by their differing views of the efficacy of linkage. Furthermore, once Carter began to speak out on human rights issues, he discovered -- to his apparent surprise -- that he could not engage the Soviet Union on these issues without it taking serious offense, nor could he count on support from U.S. allies, other than Great Britain. The Soviet reaction was not surprising to Vance and Brzezinski, who both anticipated a negative reaction to the administration’s human rights policies. Carter may also have underestimated “the substantial disquiet” among U.S. allies about the nature of his human rights commitment. Six months after his inauguration, Canadian Prime Minister Pierre E. Trudeau and German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt “warned Carter that a zealous campaign on the human rights issue threatened East-West détente.”⁴³ Trudeau cautioned that Carter’s “extreme line with Moscow on human rights could lead to a

⁴² Ibid., 630.

⁴³ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 631.

renewal of the Cold War.”⁴⁴ And Schmidt, who was the most outspoken European critic, charged that the “United States is pursuing the human rights issue too zealously, blowing the dispute out of proportion and undermining détente,” a détente that “has brought success for the Germans in particular.”⁴⁵ Thus, although everyone -- Carter, Soviet leaders, allied leaders, Vance, Brzezinski -- supported some commitment to human rights, there was no consensus about how to articulate or achieve human rights goals.

When Vance met with Carter on November 30, 1976 to discuss the secretary of state position, he told Carter that he applauded human rights being a central theme of the administration, but also cautioned that “we had to be flexible and pragmatic in dealing with specific cases that might affect our national security, and that we had to avoid rigidity.”⁴⁶ Their exchange of ideas cemented Vance’s belief that that Carter agreed with the need for a flexible policy.⁴⁷ Significantly, because Vance contended that a strategic arms limitation agreement would serve the needs of both countries and substantially advance world peace, he did not think that the Soviet Union’s restrictions

⁴⁴ Robert Trumbull, “Trudeau Urges Carter to Avoid Strain in Ties with Communist Nations,” *The New York Times*, July 17, 1977, sec. A, p. 9.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Kandell, “Some Allies in Europe Now Worry over Détente,” *The New York Times*, July 17, 1977, sec. A, p. 9.

⁴⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 29.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

on human rights should deter the United States from negotiating and reaching a mutually acceptable agreement. Thus, when Vance emphasized that limiting the nuclear arms race should “be pursued without attempting to link it to other issues,” he included human rights among those issues.⁴⁸

Brzezinski shared Carter’s and Vance’s belief that a commitment to human rights was a source of “America’s special strength,” but he advocated using human rights as an ideological weapon in the U.S. battle for influence vis-a-vis the Soviet Union.⁴⁹ Whereas Vance supported specific commitments to human rights because human rights represented the United State’s finest values, Brzezinski believed that human rights should be used to shape a “world more congenial to our values and more compatible with our interests.”⁵⁰ In addition, Brzezinski was willing to link Soviet activities limiting human rights to the United State’s decisions about détente. Specifically, he wanted to use human rights to taunt the Soviet Union, to “match Soviet ideological expansion,” and to insert human rights into the goal of making détente “more comprehensive and more reciprocal.”⁵¹ As Brzezinski later admitted, “I will not

⁴⁸ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "America in a Hostile World," *Foreign Policy* (Summer 1976): 95.

⁵⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 124.

⁵¹ Ibid., 54.

hide the fact that I also thought that there was some instrumental utility in our pursuit of human rights vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, because at the time the Soviet Union was putting us ideologically on the defensive.”⁵² Brzezinski asserted that focusing on human rights would be extraordinarily valuable, because it would allow the Carter administration to highlight a “major Soviet vulnerability” at a time that the Soviets were attempting to represent themselves as “the progressive forces of mankind, marching toward some ideologically defined future.”⁵³ Essentially, Brzezinski sought to put the Soviet Union “ideologically on the defensive” at a time “when they saw themselves as rightfully on the offensive.”⁵⁴

During the first year of the Carter administration, Cyrus Vance confronted several significant difficulties related to Carter’s and Brzezinski’s different approaches to human rights policies. First, Carter’s ill-defined but absolute commitment to human rights impaired the strategic arms negotiations and Vance’s credibility as secretary of state. Vance was also thrust into a position of trying to project a clarity about human rights policies that did not exist -- again a situation that damaged Vance’s credibility since Vance’s clarification attempts were not -- and could not be -- consistently

⁵² Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Interview with Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, March 13, 1997," *ColdWarInterviews*, <http://www.gwu.edu/nsarchiv/coldwar/interviews/episode-17brzezinski2.html>.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

successful. And finally, Brzezinski began speaking out about human rights in ways that contradicted Vance's views and undermined Vance's supposed role as primary spokesman of U.S. foreign policy.

Vance initially believed that Carter, even though he often portrayed human rights in absolute terms, embraced Vance's approach to human rights which was: support human rights wherever it is effective to do so, but make clear that strategic decisions need to be based upon multiple factors. When State Department officials, without informing either Vance or Carter, warned the Russians about silencing Soviet dissident Andrei D. Sakharov in late January 1977, both Vance and Carter publicly expressed their irritation, explained that the incident was caused by confusion in changing the management of the department, and then pledged that this would not happen again. Furthermore, Vance, with Carter's apparent blessing, used his department's blunder as an opportunity to clarify the administration's human rights position, at least in a general way:

Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance said today that the Carter Administration would 'speak frankly about injustice' wherever it occurs – including the Soviet Union – but only 'from time to time' and in a non provocative way. 'We will not be speaking out in every case; we will speak out when we believe it is advisable to do so. We do not intend to be strident or polemical, but we do believe that an abiding respect for human rights is a human value of fundamental importance and that it must be nourished.'⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Bernard Gwertzman, "Vance Says the U.S. Won't Be Strident," *The New York Times*, February 1, 1977, sec. A, p. 1.

Vance also amplified in early February 1977 that “linkage” was not an underpinning of human rights policy. Questioned in an interview, Vance appeared to “officially” abandon linkage in “what appeared to be almost a casual dismissal of the concept.”⁵⁶ In response to a question about “linkage between our feelings about the Soviet treatment of their citizens and human rights questions and other relations with them – trade, economic, and arms talks,” Vance emphasized: “No, there is no linkage...I think each of these subjects is an important subject, and each should be discussed on its own footing.”⁵⁷ Vance’s goal of assessing trade, economic, and arms control issues on their own merits was compromised, however, by Carter’s persistent references to his absolute commitment to human rights and by Brzezinski’s promotion of human rights as an ideological weapon. During the first year of the Carter administration, Vance made every effort to support human rights when he believed it was productive to do so, but to delink U.S. strategic policy toward the Soviet Union from particular human rights infractions. He was only partially successful. Vance found himself in a position of having to fight to commit and recommit Carter to an

⁵⁶ Murray Marder, "Vance Jettisons Kissinger's 'Linkage'," *The Washington Post*, February 5, 1977, sec. A, p. 10.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

approach that Vance had wrongly assumed was settled administration policy. Even when Vance won a particular fight, it was an enervating position to be in.⁵⁸

Although Carter and Brzezinski did not publicly acknowledge it, Carter's pronouncements on human rights were one factor that produced the Soviet Union's intransigence during the March 1977 SALT negotiations. In fact, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee specifically instructed Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin to raise human rights issues as a problem with Vance prior to the unsuccessful March 1977 SALT negotiations.⁵⁹ The Party leaders stressed: "Meet with Vance and tell him that you have instructions to inform President Carter and his Secretary of State of the following: Raising by the Americans in Moscow of the question of freeing Ginzburg, a Soviet citizen, convicted for his actions punishable by law in accordance with our criminal code, arouses the utmost bewilderment."⁶⁰ The Party leadership further encouraged Dobrynin to allude to U.S. violations of human rights, such as "the unemployment of millions of people, race discrimination, unequal rights for women,

⁵⁸ Mrs. Vance described her husband's indefatigable efforts to hold Carter to his policies and pledges, and stressed that it took a huge toll on Vance. From "Grace Sloane Vance, Interview by Author," April 10, 2001.

⁵⁹ "Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee, to Soviet Ambassador Anatoly F. Dobrynin, March, 1977, The Path to Disagreement: U.S.-Soviet Communications Leading to Vance's March 1977 Trip to Moscow," *Cold War International History Project Virtual Archive*, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topicid=1409&fuseaction>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

violation of personal liberties of citizens, the rising wave of crime, etc.”⁶¹ The crux of the Soviet position was that U.S. attempts to interfere in their internal affairs will “aggravate and make more difficult to resolve those problems which should be the subject of interaction and cooperation of both countries.”⁶² Dobrynin responded by giving Vance a letter on March 16 that “rejected ‘the attempts to raise questions going beyond the scope of relations between states’ such as human rights.”⁶³ In Vance’s opening talk with Soviet negotiators at the arms reduction negotiations in March 1977, he recognized Soviet hostility about Carter’s human rights pronouncements and attempted to “clear the air”:

I made reference to the fact that our human rights position springs out of fundamental values that we hold, that we are different societies, that we have different values, that we do not intend to single out the Soviet Union in what we say about human rights, that our concerns are universal in nature, and that we will continue to do what we believe is appropriate in the overall question of human rights.⁶⁴

Ultimately, many factors, including the Soviet Union’s strong preference for a more limited agreement consistent with previous negotiations, accounted for the Soviet Union’s rejection of Carter’s comprehensive, deep cuts arms control proposal in March

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 392.

⁶⁴ Bernard Gwertzman, "Vance and Brezhnev Open Moscow Talks," *The New York Times*, March 29, 1977, sec. A, p. 1.

1977. But the U.S. challenges about human rights were consequential. As reported in the media: "Several Soviet insiders have contended in private conversations that Mr. Carter was inexperienced in foreign affairs and needed to be taught a lesson by Moscow. Inherent in this argument is a supposition that if Mr. Carter mellows, he will tone down his pronouncements on human rights and other controversial issues."⁶⁵ Moreover, as Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin emphasized, the Soviet Union believed that Carter's human rights policies constituted "an abrupt departure from the policy followed by preceding administrations, thus inevitably making his relations with Moscow tense."⁶⁶ Carter's February 5, 1977 letter to Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, in which Carter gave a "personal pledge to promote human rights in the Soviet Union,"⁶⁷ particularly infuriated Soviet leadership. As Melvyn Leffler has pointed out, Soviet officials believed human rights conditions in the Soviet Union were improving, and "understood their own situation in starkly different terms than did U.S. officials."⁶⁸ Not only had the number of political prisoners in the Soviet Union substantially

⁶⁵ Christopher S. Wren, "Soviet Indicates U.S. Must Take Initiative in Mending Relations. It Blames Americans for Rift," *The New York Times*, April 4, 1977, sec. A, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 388.

⁶⁷ Carter's letter received widespread publicity as papers throughout the world published a picture of Sakharov, holding Carter's letter. See: Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 150.

⁶⁸ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 267.

declined every year from 1971, but Soviet leaders were developing a new constitution to promote “a superior way of life, a society in Brezhnev’s words “which would enable every man to develop himself more fully and more usefully.”⁶⁹ In fact, Soviet leaders were so sensitive to criticism in part because they had confronted and surmounted huge challenges, and wanted to be acknowledged for their success and their desire, as Brezhnev expressed it, to deepen socialist democracy, “that is a democracy that covers the political, social, and economic spheres, a democracy that above all, ensures social justice and social equality.”⁷⁰ As Brezhnev’s interpreter at the March 1977 arms control meeting noted, Vance’s discussion of human rights in Moscow “was taken very, very, very personally by Brezhnev and Gromyko. On the human plane, that’s how it was.”⁷¹ Thus, Carter’s human rights challenges were perceived by the Soviets as both a challenge to their power and international stature and as a personal affront.

Carter nevertheless dismissed the notion that his comments on human rights had affected Soviet decisions regarding the administration’s arms control proposal. At a news conference after Vance’s unsuccessful meeting with the Soviet leadership in March 1977, Carter was asked: “Mr. President.....Do you still believe that the Soviets

⁶⁹ Ibid., 268.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 269.

⁷¹ Ibid., 270

in no way linked your human rights crusade with arms control negotiations?”⁷² Carter responded: “I can’t certify to you that there is no linkage in the Soviets minds between the human rights effort and the SALT limitations. We have no evidence that this was the case.”⁷³ Carter’s statement, however, was not accurate because he knew from Vance’s previous conversations with Ambassador Dobrynin, as well as his own conversation with Dobrynin on February 1, 1977, that Soviets were extremely agitated about the United States challenging them about human rights.⁷⁴ Furthermore, Carter emphasized that he would not in the future “modify my human rights statements” because they are not an “intrusion in other nations’ affairs.”⁷⁵ And then, he appeared to call for an intrusion into Soviet affairs when he suggested that since the Soviet Union had assented to the Helsinki Accords, the government’s behavior could be assessed by others accordingly.⁷⁶ Finally, having restated his unswerving commitment to human rights, Carter stressed, without clarifying his rationale: “I don’t think that it’s accurate to link the human rights concept with the SALT negotiations. I think that’s an incorrect

⁷² Jimmy Carter, “SALT Negotiations with the Soviet Union. Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters, March 30, 1977,” *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7264&st=&st1=>.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 386.

⁷⁵ Carter, “Salt Negotiations with the Soviet Union,” March 30, 1977.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

linkage.”⁷⁷ Similarly, Brzezinski, who consistently supported Carter’s views about the impact of human rights on the negotiations, denied again in October 1977 that “there was a link between initial difficulties in arms negotiations and the Soviet Union’s annoyance over rights statements by members of the United States’ government.”⁷⁸

Vance did not believe that Carter’s human rights positions caused the failure of the arms control negotiations, but he suggested that “it did affect the general atmosphere in which our talks took place.”⁷⁹ Vance also believed that the Soviet Union in part rejected the comprehensive arms control proposal because the Carter administration’s pronouncements on human rights indicated that it was “more ideologically oriented than its predecessors.”⁸⁰ In June 1977, for example, Vance acknowledged that the Soviet-U.S. relationship was strained “in certain areas” and uneasy about Carter’s intentions, particularly regarding human rights.⁸¹ As committed as Vance was to promoting human rights, he was also committed to reaching an arms control agreement with the Soviets

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Bernard Gwertzman, "Brzezinski in Unusual Public Talk Sees Soviet Relations on Upswing," *The New York Times*, October 19, 1977, sec. a, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 54 -55.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 55.

⁸¹ Associated Press Special to the *Times*, "Vance Concedes Certain 'Strains' in Ties to Soviet Union. Russians Called Uneasy over U.S. Intentions," *The New York Times*, June 24, 1977, sec. A, p. 1.

that would advance world peace and security. Thus, while he worked on new negotiations with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko after the collapse of the March 1977 negotiations, he also sought to clarify how the United States would support human rights. This was almost as daunting a task as working on arms control proposals.

During the first year of the Carter administration, therefore, Vance sought to address Soviet expressions of concern about American interference in internal affairs, as well as the persistent congressional and media questions about the meaning of Carter's human rights policies. To respond to these questions, Vance began a concerted effort to define U.S. human rights policies and to hold Carter to this definition. In one of Vance's first major public addresses which took place at the University of Georgia's law school in April 1977, he argued for a realistic policy that avoided rigidity, recklessness, or naiveté, and that would "protect and enhance the dignity of the individual," but also would keep "in mind the limits of our power and of our wisdom."⁸² Vance cautioned that:

...it is not our purpose to intervene in the internal affairs of others, but as the President has emphasized, no member of the United Nations can claim that violation of internationally protected human rights is solely its own affairs. It is

⁸² Bernard Gwertzman, "Vance Asks Realism in U.S. Rights Policy. He Concedes There Are Constraints on Carter's Commitment," *The New York Times*, May 1, 1977, sec. A, p. 1.

our purpose to shape our policies in accord with our beliefs and to state them without stridency or apology, when we think it is desirable to do so.⁸³

To make a case for realism and limits, Vance provided a set of strategic questions that the United States would ask in determining specific human rights policies and actions. These included: questions regarding the nature, extent, pattern, trend, and responsibility for human rights violations; questions regarding the prospects for effective action by the United States and others, including the possibility of intervention even if the prospects for effective action were not clear or remote; and questions regarding perspective, including unintended consequences of U.S. action. Vance also observed that acting on human rights violations included a whole range of activities from speaking out to quiet diplomacy to withholding of certain types of aid. Finally Vance emphasized: “A decision about whether and how to act in the cause of human rights is a matter for informed and careful judgment...no mechanistic formula produces an automatic answer.”⁸⁴

In spite of Vance’s efforts to clarify U.S. human rights policy, he could not get the administration to speak with one voice on this issue. Two weeks after Vance’s April speech at the University of Georgia, *The New York Times* contrasted Carter’s belief that moral questions should have primacy in foreign policymaking with former

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's belief that "American commitments abroad had to be based not primarily on moral judgments, but on security ones."⁸⁵ *The Times* suggested that Carter might be "moving to the view that more can be achieved by private diplomacy than open criticism of the Soviet Union," but credited Vance with offering the guidelines for pursuing a nuanced course that was not "reckless or overly romantic."⁸⁶

In May 1977, Carter appeared to support some of Vance's human rights themes in an address at the University of Notre Dame. Remarking that human rights were a critical but not inflexible component of U.S. policy, Carter "reaffirmed America's commitment to human rights as a fundamental tenet of our foreign policy," but also cautioned that "this does not mean that we can conduct our foreign policy by rigid moral maxims."⁸⁷ He further noted that the United States was continuing its arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union with a goal of being "fair to both sides, to produce reciprocal stability, parity, and security."⁸⁸ However, Carter continued by

⁸⁵ Bernard Gwertzman, "The Limits of an Activist U.S. Approach to Promoting Respect for Human Rights Abroad," *The New York Times*, May 18, 1977, sec. A, p. 14.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Jimmy Carter, "Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame, May 22, 1977," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print/php?pip=7552>.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

tweaking the Soviet Union: “We hope to persuade the Soviet Union that one country cannot impose its system of society upon another”⁸⁹ – a statement that left open the question of whether an arms control agreement would be contingent upon the Soviet Union’s actions regarding human rights.

Although Carter did not specifically address the need for flexibility in the application of his human rights goals beyond his Notre Dame speech, he began to acknowledge the impact of human rights on the SALT negotiations even as he continued to express surprise at the negative Soviet reaction. In an interview with the media in June 1977, Carter observed:

There has been a surprising, adverse reaction in the Soviet Union to our stand on human rights. We’ve never singled them out. And I think I’ve been quite reticent in trying to publicly condemn the Soviets. I’ve never said anything except complimentary things about Mr. Brezhnev, for instance, but apparently that’s provided a greater obstacle to other friendly pursuits of common goals, like in SALT, than I had anticipated.⁹⁰

In general, Carter continued to articulate an unswerving commitment to human rights, but without the caveats of Vance’s position and over time with some of the ideological nuances of Brzezinski’s position. In June 1977, he again highlighted the primacy he gave to human rights by having the State Department’s new coordinator for

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Jimmy Carter, "Interview with the President. Question-and-Answer Session with a Group of Publishers, Editors, and Broadcaster, June 24, 1977," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?pip=7552>.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7726&st=&st1=>.

Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, Patricia Derian, sworn in at a White House ceremony – a highly unusual event for a State Department appointment at that level. Although this year-and-a-half-old office had been established as a small fact-finding office on violations of human rights, under Carter the office expanded its staff with the understanding that legislation would raise Derian's position to an assistant secretary level. This indeed occurred. In taking the position, Derian noted that she did not agree with former Secretary of State Kissinger's quiet diplomacy definition of human rights: "I must say, his definition is not my definition."⁹¹ She further stressed that even though she reported to Vance and Vance's Deputy Warren Christopher, she had received assurances of direct access to Carter.⁹² By implying that she could potentially need direct access to Carter, Derian undercut not only the support that both Vance and Christopher accorded human rights, but also Vance's authority as primary foreign policy aide.

By late summer 1977, critics of Carter's human rights and other foreign policies began to question whether Jimmy Carter was "really up to the job," and why "the talented foreign affairs advisors Carter has brought into the Administration have not yet

⁹¹ Barbara Gamarekian, "Human Rights Spokeswoman," *The New York Times*, June 23, 1977, sec. C, p. 13.

⁹² Ibid.

established an effective means of charting the course of the nation's foreign policy.”⁹³

In a late summer review of the effectiveness of Carter's foreign policies, *Time Magazine* asserted regarding Carter's human rights policies: “As he has often done in domestic affairs, he sometimes seems to think that enunciating a great goal is the same as doing something about it.”⁹⁴ *Time*'s editors suggested that Carter's human rights policy had been successful in positively changing the U.S. image abroad, and quoted the plaudits of a Chilean politician: “The U.S. is now in the forefront of the fight for freedom and has once again assumed moral and spiritual leadership.”⁹⁵ But the editors also pointed out that Carter's human rights pronouncements were “straining relations” with political leaders around the world, even causing new, repressive crackdowns on dissidents in some countries, and were selectively applied to some countries, such as the Soviet Union or Chile, but not to the Shah of Iran.⁹⁶ The editors further raised concerns that Carter might state that progress on arms control had not been “linked” to human rights, but stating that did not make it so.⁹⁷ Interviewed for this review, George Ball

⁹³ “Carter Spins the World,” *Time*, August 8, 1977, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,915195,00.html>.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

suggested: “I think the Administration is pursuing the human rights business without fully taking all implications into account. To some extent it has become a stuck needle, getting in the way of a lot of things which might be more important in the long term.”⁹⁸

Nowhere in this article was Cyrus Vance mentioned as a key architect, reviser, or implementer of Carter’s policy. The article also did not reference Vance’s major human rights policy address of late April that supposedly established a strategic approach to dealing with human rights issues. If Vance were indeed Carter’s key foreign policy aide and spokesman, no one would know it from this fairly substantial policy review.

Into this unclear policy thicket, Brzezinski advanced his views of an ideological human rights policy that would continue to tweak the Soviet Union. To clarify the U.S.-Soviet strategic relationship, the National Security Council deliberated and prepared for Carter’s signature in August 1977 Presidential Directive NSC-18, which addressed U.S. national security policy vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. Drafted by Brzezinski, the directive specifically called for competing “politically with the Soviet Union by pursuing the basic American commitment to human rights and national independence.”⁹⁹ This language reflected Brzezinski’s call to use human rights as an ideological tool rather than Vance’s desire to not use human rights as a tool of “power

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Jimmy Carter, "Presidential Directive NSC-18. U.S. National Strategy August 24, 1977," *Jimmy Carter Library*, photocopied, http://jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/pres_directive.phtml.

politics.”¹⁰⁰ Moreover, embedded in this directive was Brzezinski’s language about US-Soviet relations being dominated by both “competition and cooperation, with the attendant risk of conflict as well as the opportunity for stabilizing US-Soviet relations.”¹⁰¹ The presidential directive, although drafted with Vance’s input as a SCC committee member, did not reflect the nuances of Vance’s position on either human rights or arms control. It concretely signified that Vance and Brzezinski were not on the same page about the role of human rights in U.S. foreign policy, particularly regarding the Soviet Union. It also called into question whether Vance or Brzezinski had greater influence on Carter regarding Soviet policy.

Vance could not put the issue of human rights linkages to arms control to rest during the first year of the administration. In a November news conference, he reiterated: “Let me say, as I have said before, that insofar as SALT and the treatment of the dissidents is concerned, I do not think that there is any linkage. I do not think in the past that there was, and I do not think that there is now.”¹⁰² And having asserted that there was no linkage, Vance also insisted that this did not diminish the U.S.’s commitment to human rights. In response to a November 1977 interview question

¹⁰⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 29.

¹⁰¹ Presidential Directive NSC-18.

¹⁰² Cyrus Vance, “Secretary Vance’s News Conference of November 2, 1977,” *Department of State Bulletin*, Volume 77, 712.

about whether or not the United States was backing away from supporting human rights in the Soviet Union, Vance emphasized: “We have not. We continue to speak out where we believe it is necessary to do so. Where we think we can accomplish the same objective quietly, we are doing it on a quiet basis. This is not backing off in any way whatsoever.”¹⁰³

While Vance was articulating a nuanced view of human rights and advocating a case-by-case assessment of how and where to apply U.S. principles, Carter vacillated between agreeing with Vance and portraying an absolute commitment to human rights as the central focus of his foreign policy. Brzezinski’s vocal and persistent commitment to using human rights as an ideological tool ensured the administration would not speak with one voice. Brzezinski continued a campaign to link human rights and other elements of Soviet behavior to the U.S.-Soviet strategic relationship. He privately lobbied Carter to maintain his commitment to “issues of grand principle” by communicating to him flattering comments that administration critics had made about the “grandeur” of his objectives and the fact that “more than any of your predecessors since Truman,” Carter was “focusing on truly central issues.”¹⁰⁴ Brzezinski

¹⁰³ Cyrus Vance, “Secretary Vance Interviewed for U.S. News and World Report, November 21, 1977,” *Department of State Bulletin*, Volume 77, 732.

¹⁰⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Memorandum for the President. NSC Weekly Report #31, October 7, 1977,” *Declassified Documents Reference System (Galenet)*, <http://0-galenet.galegroup.com.librarylausys.georgetown.edu>.

increasingly appeared in public forums or gave media backgrounders in which he “defended the emphasis on human rights in the Carter Administration’s foreign policy, and denied that there was a link between initial difficulties in arms negotiations and the Soviet Union’s annoyance over rights statements.”¹⁰⁵ But, then having argued that the Soviet Union did not link its arms control decisions to U.S. human rights pronouncements, Brzezinski continued to make the case for a U.S. détente policy that imposed linkage.

By the end of the first year of the administration, Carter’s commitment to human rights as a central tenet of his foreign policy had been stated and restated. The degree to which this commitment affected the strategic relationship with the Soviet Union was not fully known. But, although the commitment was clearly a central focus of policy, the nature of the commitment itself was not clear. Even though Vance believed that Carter ultimately shared his views, observers of the administration did not detect a uniform, cohesive policy:

The new administration’s approach to this problem does not appear to have been firmly set. Those who favor a foreign policy with a strong emphasis on human rights – an outlook that has found an articulate theoretician in the President’s top national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, represent one tendency, *hitherto in control*. (emphasis added) Others on the team appear to take somewhat different views. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance seemed to hint at this discomfort

¹⁰⁵ Bernard Gwertzman, "Brzezinski in Unusual Public Talk Sees Soviet Relations on Upswing," *The New York Times*, October 19, 1977, sec. A, p. 2.

when he said recently that ‘in pursuing a human rights policy, we must always keep in minds the limits of our power and of our wisdom.’¹⁰⁶

In February 1978, Carter promulgated Presidential Directive/NSC-30 on human rights which stressed that human rights would be a “major objective of U.S. foreign policy.”¹⁰⁷ The directive stated that the policy was a global one, but that the “cultural, political, and historical characteristics of each nation,” as well as “other fundamental U.S. interests with respect to the nation in question,” would affect how the policy would be applied.¹⁰⁸ It also called for using positive incentives, such as economic benefits and political relations, to improve a nation’s commitment to human rights. The directive thus restated Carter’s desire to make human rights central to his foreign policy, and toned down some of his absolutistic themes regarding human rights. It did not, however, provide specific guidance for addressing the problems in the U.S.-Soviet strategic relationship. For Vance’s purposes, the directive did no harm, but also accomplished little.

Carter’s failure to clarify the meaning and extent of his human rights policies, his tendency to define human rights as absolute, and his willingness to let Brzezinski

¹⁰⁶ Samuel Pizar, "Let's Put Detente Back on the Rails," *The New York Times*, September 25, 1977, sec. SM, p. 32.

¹⁰⁷ Jimmy Carter, “Presidential Directive/NSC-30, February 17, 1978,” *Jimmy Carter Library*, http://jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/pres_directive.;phtml.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

use human rights as an ideological weapon complicated Vance's negotiations with the Soviets. As Gaddis Smith observed, it produced a U.S.-Soviet "dialogue of accusation and petulant rebuttal ... for four years – in speeches, diplomatic exchanges, and Pravda articles."¹⁰⁹ Smith questioned: "Was any good accomplished or any harm done?"¹¹⁰ In response, Smith suggested that Carter's emphasis on human rights in regards to the Soviet Union resulted in some Jewish citizens being allowed to emigrate and some dissidents being able to leave. This was indeed valuable. And Vance, who cautioned the Soviets that their human rights actions affected their standing in the world and in the United States, made innumerable, sometimes successful appeals to encourage the Soviets to treat dissidents according to the Helsinki accords.

The March 1977 SALT Negotiations

When Jimmy Carter became president, he inherited what Strobe Talbott referred to as "an ill-defined commitment and a well-defined stalemate" in arms control.¹¹¹ For over fifty months, the Nixon and Ford administrations had undertaken SALT II negotiations. In November 1974, Presidents Gerald Ford and Leonid Brezhnev reached

¹⁰⁹ Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 67-68.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 68.

¹¹¹ Strobe Talbott, *Endgame. The Inside Story of SALT II* (New York: Harper&Row, 1980), 39.

an agreement at Vladivostok “to replace the SALT I Interim Agreement on offensive weapons, which was to expire in October 1977, with a SALT II Treaty lasting until 1985.”¹¹² This agreement had not been finalized as a SALT II agreement, but was a communiqué pointed toward that. As Olav Njølstad described, President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, attempting to “satisfy the Senate’s call for symmetrical parity,” convinced the Soviet government to “accept a set of aggregate force limits that were to apply equally to the strategic forces of either side.”¹¹³ The United States and the Soviet Union could each deploy 2400 strategic launchers, including a triad of ICBMs, SLBMs, and strategic bombers, with each country having the flexibility to determine the distribution of the bombers within the triad. The agreement also established equal limits for the number MIRVed missiles, and restricted the Soviet Union to 308 heavy missiles. Agreements were not reached about issues related to the Backfire bomber, or cruise missile, although “there was a tacit understanding that these weapons systems would be dealt with later on in the negotiations.”¹¹⁴ The Ford administration then “put SALT on the shelf until after the

¹¹² Vance, *Hard Choices*, 47.

¹¹³ Njølstad, "Keys of Keys," 36.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

election,” with “every expectation that SALT II could be completed before the expiration of the Interim Agreement in October 1977.”¹¹⁵

For the first two and a half months of the Carter administration, as the foreign policy principals debated how to approach SALT II, Jimmy Carter raised the prospect of a comprehensive agreement with deep cuts. As Cyrus Vance saw it, it was critical either to have a new agreement by October 1977, or to demonstrate “substantial progress” toward a treaty.¹¹⁶ Along with Paul Warnke, the head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and chief SALT negotiator, Vance made a strong case for taking “advantage of the political strength and momentum of a new administration, and the traditional honeymoon with Congress, to attempt to conclude an agreement based essentially on Vladivostok, which would postpone the cruise missile and Backfire issues until SALT III.”¹¹⁷ Vance understood the attractiveness of the argument for a proposal containing deeper cuts: “In the long term, this was clearly where we had to go.”¹¹⁸ But he argued that it would be extraordinarily difficult to negotiate successfully for that position:

¹¹⁵ Andrew J. Pierre, “The Diplomacy of SALT,” *International Security* 5, no. 1 (Summer 1980): 182.

¹¹⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 48.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

I had strong doubts that the comprehensive approach could succeed without extremely difficult negotiations involving substantial compromise on both sides. In my view, the modest alternative – accepting the Vladivostok framework – offered the best prospect for a rapid conclusion of a SALT II Treaty that would limit Soviet strategic forces and provide a more stable foundation for U.S.-Soviet relations in what could well be a rough period ahead.¹¹⁹

Just as ideological concerns and a belief in linkage underlay Brzezinski's human rights perspective, so too they influenced his view of arms control negotiations as “a useful means for publicly testing Soviet intentions and, if the Soviets responded favorably, for halting the momentum of the Soviet military buildup.”¹²⁰ Observing that Vance and Warnke wanted to “stabilize the American-Soviet relationship and generate more wide-ranging American-Soviet cooperation,” Brzezinski argued to the contrary that:

...we should redefine détente into a more purposeful and activist policy for the West. The code words “reciprocal” and “comprehensive” meant to me that we should insist on equal treatment (retaliating in kind, if necessary) and that the Soviets could not have a free ride in some parts of the world while pursuing détente where it suited them.¹²¹

Not only did Brzezinski support linking the United States' arms control policies to “responsible” Soviet behavior, but he also maintained that the U.S. should make an effort to lower the SALT ceilings from the Vladivostok levels. Although Brzezinski

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 49.

¹²⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 50.

¹²¹ Ibid., 147.

noted that it was inaccurate that the “deep-cuts proposal was foisted on Carter by Brown and/or me,” he clearly favored that position.¹²² Moreover, as chair of the SCC meetings, Brzezinski expressed delight in the way he could “guide” the meetings effectively. As he recounted these meetings, he suggested that he was substantially in control of the process and content. He directed the discussion so that Vance would appear to have “the last word,” but then suggested that he had to stay on top of things to convince Vance to take “a firm and unyielding stand in Moscow. It is to be expected that the Russians will try to be quite tough, and we should not immediately pull back and start making concessions, which I suspect some members of the U.S. delegation will be tempted to do.”¹²³

At a March 19, 1977 meeting regarding the presidential directive to the negotiating team on SALT, the president, the secretaries of state and defense, and Brzezinski reviewed all SALT proposals – from proposals based on the Vladivostok agreement to proposals incorporating deeper cuts. Carter then selected the deep-cuts proposal, in large part because it supported his campaign and inaugural pledge “to work toward the ultimate goal of eliminating nuclear weapons from the earth.”¹²⁴ In its final

¹²² Zbigniew Brzezinski, Richard Gardner, and Henry Owen, “Memorandum to Governor Jimmy Carter,” November 3, 1976.

¹²³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 158-159.

¹²⁴ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 220.

version, the comprehensive proposal reduced the 2400 launchers on each side specified in the Vladivostok agreement to a range of 1800-2000 launchers. It further established subceilings for MIRVed ICBMs and MIRVed SLBMs, and reduced the Soviets heavy missile force from 308 to 150 missiles. To compensate the Soviet Union for the reduction in heavy missiles, it offered to ban all new ICBMs, which required the U.S. to cancel its MX program, and to impose a 2500 km limit on cruise missiles.¹²⁵ Carter made this decision with the knowledge that the deep-cuts proposal was inconsistent with Brezhnev's response to his letters and with his earlier discussion with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, both of whom indicated that the Soviets would only support "a very slow and cautious approach to the questions we had to face."¹²⁶ In fact, Brezhnev had characterized the arms control ideas Carter had proffered in letters and meetings in January and February as "deliberately unacceptable."¹²⁷ Disregarding these strong Soviet preferences, Carter instructed Vance to negotiate on the basis of a comprehensive, deep-cuts proposal, and reluctantly agreed to Vance being able to offer a backup position that proposed overall weapons ceilings about 10% below the limits previously laid out in the Vladivostok agreement.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Njølstad, "Keys of Keys," 39.

¹²⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 222-224.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

How did Vance react to Carter's overruling his proposal based on the Vladivostok agreement? As significant as this was, Vance did not view this as deeply disturbing or as a resignable issue for several reasons. First, Vance recognized not only that Carter's proposal had tremendous advantages on the upside and thought there was a slim chance the Soviets might be willing to entertain it, but he was comforted that he could offer the Soviets a backup position. As Vance later observed:

I knew that the president's attempt to 'jump over SALT II' was a long shot. I disagreed with the decision but I was determined to give it my best. It might be that the Soviets, confronting a new president and the prospect of having to deal with him for at least four and perhaps eight years, would be willing to take a bold step. We could not know unless we tried. And success would mean a dramatic breakthrough in turning around the arms race.¹²⁹

Furthermore, it was clear at this point that Carter was not advocating linking the U.S. approach to arms control to other aspects of Soviet behavior – a position that would have undermined Vance's faith in Carter and in his understanding of their relationship. As Carter had emphasized in statements that echoed Vance's sentiments, "My intention was to cooperate with the Soviets whenever possible, and I saw a successful effort in controlling nuclear weapons as the best tool for improving our relations."¹³⁰ Vance further recognized that a deep-cuts proposal, which had the support of Senator Henry Jackson, might have a better chance of Senate ratification than an agreement based on

¹²⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 49.

¹³⁰ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 223.

Vladivostok.¹³¹ Nevertheless, Vance's decision to remain in his position after losing a significant policy battle, to advocate for a position that he did not agree with, and then to bear the consequences of negotiating failure was clearly one of the "hard choices" he made as secretary of state.¹³² But not all "hard choices" that produced negative consequences merited resignation.

Vance, therefore, justified and accepted losing this policy battle. Nevertheless, the policy battle revealed several disquieting problems regarding his influence relative to Brzezinski's, as well as Brzezinski's willingness to undermine Vance's authority. These included: Brzezinski's efforts to control and guide (i.e., manipulate) the arms control debate in the SCC meetings; Brzezinski's direct contacts with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin as the Moscow negotiations were beginning -- contacts that undercut Vance's negotiating authority; and Brzezinski's comments to Carter that Vance might not be tough enough and that Vance needed to stick to his tough instructions. Brzezinski's comments and behaviors were worrisome signs that Vance's role as chief foreign policy advisor would never have the clarity and strength that Vance had assumed it would have when he took the secretary of state position and that he would have to be on guard to preserve his authority.¹³³

¹³¹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 51.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 49.

¹³³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 160-161.

As Vance headed to Moscow in late March 1977, he found himself in an extraordinarily difficult predicament: he had the task of persuading Brezhnev to consider an arms control proposal that the Soviets did not want;¹³⁴ he had to do so in a highly-charged atmosphere in which the Soviets were clearly sensitive to Carter's human rights criticisms; and he had to grapple with Soviet displeasure over Carter's release of U.S. proposals (and Brzezinski's background releases) prior to the negotiating meetings. As Vance emphasized:

The already charged atmosphere surrounding my trip, our first encounter with the Soviet Union, was intensified by the president's decision to outline the objectives of the comprehensive proposal in a speech to the UN General Assembly before I left for Moscow, and by a high level administration backgrounding of the press. Until then both sides, at least in public statements, had adhered to the confidentiality of the negotiations. This helped insulate the talks from excessive political or ideological posturing. The administration's 'openness' violated that canon of the SALT process.¹³⁵

Indeed, President Carter's March 17 address before the UN General Assembly and comments made during a subsequent news conference before Vance's negotiations began were major presidential blunders. Not only did Carter reveal a "preference" for "strict controls or even a freeze on new types and new generations of weaponry and with a deep reduction in the strategic arms of both sides," but he then undercut his commitment to that position by acknowledging that "alternatively and perhaps much

¹³⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 52.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

more easily, we could conclude a limited agreement on those elements of the Vladivostok accord on which we can find complete consensus, and set aside for prompt consideration and subsequent negotiations the more contentious issues and also the deeper reductions in nuclear weapons which I favor.”¹³⁶ In releasing this information, Carter disregarded advice provided not only by Vance, but also by Secretary of Defense Harold Brown who had previously negotiated with the Russians and “knew that the Soviet Union would interpret the publicity as a propaganda ploy; the Kremlin would see the U.S. attempting to establish itself as the most vigorous proponent of disarmament and to put the Soviet Union on the defensive before Vance even reached the negotiating table.”¹³⁷ Carter, however, had followed the advice of Brzezinski, who argued that the United States had “a very appealing position,” and that the U.S.’s “forthcoming” approach would “put a lot of pressure on the Soviets.”¹³⁸

Carter’s March 27th news conference, held several days before Vance’s arrival in Moscow, further damaged Vance’s ability to negotiate. First, Carter declared that he had evidence that Brezhnev was receptive to the U.S.’s SALT II proposals, which was not the case. Carter’s evidence was solely that the Soviet government was welcoming

¹³⁶ Jimmy Carter, “Address Before the General Assembly, March 17, 1977,” *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=7183>.

¹³⁷ Talbott, *Endgame*, 66.

¹³⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 162.

“Secretary Vance to the Soviet Union and have helped us prepare a very comprehensive agenda...” – behavior that did not demonstrate Soviet enthusiasm about Carter’s arms proposal.¹³⁹ Second, he again weakened Vance’s negotiating posture when he stated: “If we are disappointed, which is a possibility, then we’ll try to modify our stance.”¹⁴⁰ Strobe Talbott observed that this comment “caused even his most loyal and obedient supporters to wince” because “it was inviting the Soviets to reject both proposals out of hand and simply to wait for the U.S. to come back with something more to their liking.”¹⁴¹

Why did Carter make these statements, particularly since he knew from Vance’s conversation with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin a few days before Vance’s meeting with Brezhnev that Moscow was negative about his comprehensive, deep-cut proposal?¹⁴² Many things explained Carter’s counterproductive openness, including what Strobe Talbott described as his arrogant, naïve belief that he could “go over the head” of his advisors and the Soviet bureaucracy in appealing to Soviet public

¹³⁹ Jimmy Carter, "The President's News Conference of March 24, 1977," *The American Presidency Project*, March 24, 1977, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=7229>.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Talbott, *Endgame*, 67.

¹⁴² Vance, *Hard Choices*, 52.

opinion.¹⁴³ Addressing criticism of his openness during the March 24, 1977 news conference, Carter emphasized that it was important “even in very complex matters when the outcome of negotiations might still be in doubt, to let the Members of Congress and the people of this country know what is going on and some of the options to be pursued, some of the consequences of success, some of the consequences of failure.”¹⁴⁴ In addition, Carter was stroking Senator Henry Jackson, a vocal critic of the “Kissinger-Nixon-Ford approach” to détente. Jackson had not only praised Carter’s openness, but also supported Carter’s call for “substantial mutual reductions” in strategic arms.¹⁴⁵ And finally, Carter’s decision reflected advice given to him by Brzezinski: “He had a notion, encouraged by Brzezinski, that he might be able to shock the highest level of the civilian leadership in Moscow into paying close attention to his initiative before the rigidly conservative Soviet military and diplomatic establishments had a chance to pick the proposal apart and lobby against it.”¹⁴⁶

Vance’s negotiating efforts in Moscow were not successful. On the evening of March 30, Brezhnev harshly rejected the administration’s proposals, both the

¹⁴³ Talbott, *Endgame*, 66.

¹⁴⁴ Carter, “The President's News Conference of March 4, 1977.”

¹⁴⁵ Talbott, *Endgame*, 66; and Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, “A Carter-Jackson Bridge,” *The Washington Post*, March 14, 1977, sec. A, p. 23.

¹⁴⁶ Talbott, *Endgame*, 66.

comprehensive, deep-cuts proposal and the backup Vladivostok proposal, without “even a hint of a counterproposal.”¹⁴⁷ Vance left Moscow with an understanding that he and Gromyko would continue discussions in May in Geneva. Vance’s explanation for Soviet intransigence included three major points:

First, before the Vladivostok negotiations, the Soviet leadership had thrashed out compromises that enabled Brezhnev to make significant concessions in his discussions with Ford and Kissinger. Brezhnev and others of like mind did not want to reopen a harsh debate within the Politburo and with the military on new and more extensive Soviet compromises, as they would have been required by the comprehensive proposal. For the Soviet government and for Brezhnev personally, Vladivostok had become politically sacrosanct.....Second, the Soviets may have seen the comprehensive proposal as an unacceptable attempt to reduce Soviet numerical advantages in land-based missiles, which constituted the bulk of their strategic forces....Third, the Soviets were suspicious that the Carter administration was more ideologically oriented than its predecessors, and that it had put forward the comprehensive proposal as a propaganda ploy to capture world opinion.¹⁴⁸

Vance’s explanation for Soviet behavior was accurate. Ambassador Dobrynin later explained that the Soviets had wanted “continuity” in the Soviet-American relationship, and that the Soviet leadership had “staked its prestige on the Vladivostok accord as the basis for SALT II.”¹⁴⁹ Dobrynin stressed that Carter’s rejection of Vladivostok was “a

¹⁴⁷ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 54.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 55.

¹⁴⁹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 393.

serious psychological shock for Brezhnev, who would have found it politically impossible to reassemble an arms control package” for the Soviet Politburo.¹⁵⁰

Vance recognized that the failure of these negotiations created significant foreign policy problems. Obviously, the SALT negotiations were more prolonged than they needed to have been. Vance stressed that this even had domestic, political consequences:

Perhaps the most serious cost of the Moscow discussions was to be felt later in the domestic battle over SALT ratification. The comprehensive proposal gave a weapon to anti-SALT and anti-detente hard-liners, who held up the deep-cuts proposal as the only standard against which to measure the success of the ultimate agreement. A SALT Treaty that contained limitations less stringent than the comprehensive proposal would be attacked as falling short of ‘real arms control.’¹⁵¹

Essentially, the nature of Carter’s proposal, both its substance and the manner in which he advocated for it, played a major role in dragging out the negotiations for two more years until Carter and Leonid Brezhnev could sign an acceptable treaty in June of 1979.¹⁵² Leslie Gelb, who was on Vance’s negotiating team, noted that the agreement reached with the Soviets almost two and a half years later was essentially the Vladivostok agreement:

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 394.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² See: Leslie Gelb, "Interview. The Soviets Reject the Comprehensive Proposal, February 28. 1999," <http://222.gw7u.edu/-nsarchiv/coldwar/interviews/episode-19/gelb>.

We had done some things to it, I think to improve it, clarify, but in terms of cuts they were more or less what had been agreed to three years before. And in terms of limits on the developments of new weapon systems, there were none. So we had labored - that is, Henry Kissinger for several years, and then the Carter Administration for several years - we had labored for almost seven years, and produced an arms control mouse.

In the end, the Senate did not ratify the treaty. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, Carter knew that treaty ratification was at least temporarily doomed and asked the Senate to defer consideration. The result: the unresolved issues of SALT II were carried into the Ronald Reagan administration.

The Nature of Vance's Battles

The nature of the internal administration policy debates about human rights and arms control, as well as Carter's failure consistently to treat Vance as his prime foreign policy aide and spokesman, taught Vance that he would need to fight two battles: first, a battle to influence Carter on substance; and second, a battle to preserve his own authority. In many respects, Vance had three adversaries: Carter, who wanted to take the lead in foreign policy; Brzezinski, who worked diligently to advance his view of Soviet power and his own standing; and himself, because he would not play bureaucratic games in an environment in which bureaucratic games were being played. Although Carter was ultimately responsible for the nature and tone of the policymaking process, Brzezinski was a formidable colleague/adversary.

Working diligently to augment his influence from the first day of Carter's administration, Brzezinski nipped away at Vance's authority during the internal SALT deliberations and Moscow negotiations. Just as Brzezinski steered Carter to supporting the counterproductive, deep cuts proposal, so too he sought to take control of the public justification of the proposal after the Soviets had rejected it. The news conferences held by both Vance and Brzezinski after the Moscow negotiations illustrated their substantive and professional incompatibilities. After the negotiations concluded, Vance met with the media on March 30, 1977 to detail the proposals he had brought to Moscow, to express his disappointment that the Soviets neither accepted the primary or backup proposal nor proposed an alternative, and to emphasize that both sides agreed to continue discussions in the future.¹⁵³ The next day, Vance reiterated his points in a similar news conference on a plane en route to London in which he strongly backed Carter's proposals, and refuted an interrogator's question about whether the Soviet Union had administered a real blow to the United States and to Vance. Vance simply and strongly stated: "They haven't taken my breath away."¹⁵⁴

While Vance was meeting with the media, as well as before and during Vance's mission, Brzezinski was likewise appearing as the administration's spokesman, and

¹⁵³ Cyrus Vance, "Vance's News March 30, 1977 News Conference," in *Department of State Bulletin*, (April 25, 1977), 400.

¹⁵⁴ Cyrus Vance, "April 1 News Conference Aboard Aircraft En Route to London" in *Department of State Bulletin*, (April 25, 1977), 405.

underlining not only his emphasis on competition with the Soviet Union, but also his in-depth, key policymaking role in SALT. In Brzezinski's April 1 news conference (sanctioned by Carter), he praised the "very finely crafted" U.S. proposal, including specific details of the proposal that Vance had purposely not provided to the media. The substance and tone of Brzezinski's conference conveyed that he was either in charge or the most significant player:

I don't propose to engage in any recrimination but would merely like to lay out for you the kind of proposal we made and the thinking that went into that proposal, for I believe that the thinking the proposal reflected is almost as important as the proposal itself....We did not expect the Soviets to accept this total framework on the basis of three days' talks. We expected them to consider it. Our judgment – and I have talked by telephone with Secretary Vance when he was still in Moscow, I talked to some of the other members of the delegation since – was that the discussions were generally conducted in businesslike fashion, that the Soviet side, through little gestures, went out of its way to indicate that this is an ongoing relationship.¹⁵⁵

Indeed, one media observer noted that "The Brzezinski briefing unwittingly demonstrates that the American approach to Moscow talks was self-indulgent and irresponsible in almost every respect."¹⁵⁶

As Brzezinski continued to push his definition of the competitive nature of the U.S.-Soviet relationship and gradually increased his public exposure, administration

¹⁵⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Presidential Assistant Brzezinski's News Conference of April 1," *Department of State Bulletin* (April 25, 1977): 415.

¹⁵⁶ Joseph Kraft, "Assessing the Difficulty in Moscow," *The Washington Post*, April 5, 1977, p. 19.

observers began to pick up that differences concerning Soviet policy existed among Carter's advisors. Just six months into the Carter administration, *The New York Times* highlighted the "lack of coordination on Soviet policy within the Administration," and suggested that "Mr. Carter has seemed at times to plunge into human rights and arms control initiatives without taking the probable Soviet reaction into account."¹⁵⁷ The *Times* deemed Brzezinski as "the President's chief source of counsel on the Soviet Union," noted that he had "few qualms about competing actively with the Russians around the world," and asserted that Brzezinski's views "were apparently the main influence" on Carter's new emphasis on competition and cooperation with the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁸ In November 1977, Brzezinski's influence and self-promotion were noted by David Broder of *The Washington Post*: "In recent weeks, transcripts of Brzezinski's utterances from here to Bonn and back have been fluttering onto reporters' desks as gently, and almost as persistently as the autumn leaves."¹⁵⁹ Indeed, Brzezinski's aggressiveness and eagerness to be a player internally and externally were palpable in a November 1977 memorandum he prepared for Carter which detailed that he and staff (not State Department staff) were meeting with a panel of distinguished scientists about

¹⁵⁷ Bernard Gwertzman, "Mr. Carter Listening to More Soviet Experts," *The New York Times*, July 24, 1977, sec. E, p. 3.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ David Broder, "Brzezinski: A New Household Word?" *The Washington Post*, November 6, 1977, p. 89.

SALT issues, advocated a Congressional strategy for counter-punching on SALT, expressed his willingness to meet with Senator Jackson, and mentioned that he had held a 45-minute meeting with labor leaders, George Meany and Lane Kirkland to discuss foreign policy and SALT.¹⁶⁰ Given Carter's supposed commitment to Vance as the administration spokesman, these external contacts should have been in the purview of the State Department.

Brzezinski's comments during and after the Moscow meeting, as well as his background comments to the media, clearly troubled Vance.¹⁶¹ But, other than to express his concern publicly that there "had been too much undisciplined talk before the Moscow trip, which had resulted in inflated expectations that the talks would produce a breakthrough," Vance decided to fight the war for influence with Carter by working harder to "become a more assertive advisor," to argue "forcefully that lowering the volume and visibility of the talks would make SALT less subject to the ups and downs of the Soviet-American relationship,"¹⁶² and to soldiering on in talks with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko – a "painstaking," time-consuming process.¹⁶³ Furthermore,

¹⁶⁰ Zbigniew Brzezinski, to Jimmy Carter, "NSC Weekly Report #36, November 11, 1977," *Declassified Documents Reference System*, <http://0-galenet.galegroup.com.library.lausys.lausys:georgetown.edu/servelet/DDRS?>.

¹⁶¹ Talbott, *Endgame*, 75.

¹⁶² Ibid, 75, 80.

¹⁶³ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 57.

Vance consistently pressed his view of the benefits of a stable U.S.-Soviet relationship with Carter. While Brzezinski continued to raise with Carter the desirability of taking “an assertive and forward position” on Soviet issues, which in part meant linking arms control to other Soviet behaviors,¹⁶⁴ Vance and SALT negotiator Paul Warnke presented the case for stability:

Our March proposal went well beyond past negotiations in an effort to achieve a more far-reaching arms control agreement. The Soviets proved unready to match this vision. For SALT II, we believe that we must continue to make the first moves. From our perspective, our overriding objective should be stability in US-Soviet relations. The stability represented by a SALT II agreement is as important to arms control as the content of the likely agreement itself. This done, we can move quickly to begin negotiating the deeper limitations you and we envision for SALT III.¹⁶⁵

Finally, with a failed negotiation in the backdrop, the administration confronted and attempted to respond to criticism about its foreign policy competence. As Leslie Gelb noted, the failure of the Moscow talks colored the views of the administration’s (and Vance’s) competence:

When the Soviets said no, flatly no to the American proposal, I think most of us on the American side knew that the fat was in the world publicity fire, that here the Carter Administration had gone to Moscow with new hopes, new dreams to limit the nuclear arms race, and had failed; that it meant somehow we didn’t

¹⁶⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “NSC Weekly Report #15, June 3, 1977,” *Declassified Documents Reference System*, <http://0-galenet.galegroup.com.library.lausys.lausys:georgetown.edu/servelet/DDRS?>

¹⁶⁵ Cyrus R. Vance and Paul C. Warnke, “Memorandum for the President on SALT, August 30, 1977,” *Declassified Documents Reference System*, http://www.ddrs.psmedia.com/tplweb-cgi/fastweb?getdoc+ddrs__im.

understand the Soviets, that the Carter team was inept, and that we would not be able to manage Soviet-American relations.¹⁶⁶

In July 1977, to address some of the concerns about the policymaking process regarding the Soviet Union, Carter made a decision that provided mixed signals about Vance's and Brzezinski's roles: he appointed an interagency unit, headed by Soviet expert Marshall D. Shulman and George S. Vest, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, to coordinate Soviet policy. Shulman and Vest were to report to the State Department and Secretary Vance. The media reported that "this is the first time to officials' knowledge that an interagency committee has been created to coordinate policy toward a particular country."¹⁶⁷ In some respects, Carter's decision appeared to be an acknowledgement that the administration, possibly Vance, had not done an adequate job developing Soviet policy. Yet, because Shulman and Vest reported to Vance, the appointment also appeared to enhance Vance's authority. In other respects, Carter's appointments appeared to undercut Brzezinski who was supposed to exercise an interagency coordinating role for Carter. The fact that Shulman was not only a close advisor and friend to Vance, but also shared Vance's views of Soviet strategy appeared

¹⁶⁶ Leslie Gelb, "The Soviets Rejected the Comprehensive Proposal," February 28, 1999.

¹⁶⁷ Bernard Gwertzman, "Interagency Unit under State Department to Coordinate Policy Toward Soviet Union," *The New York Times*, July 19, 1977, sec. A, p. 1.

to bolster Vance's influence.¹⁶⁸ Sensitive to news reports that Shulman's appointment had undercut the NSC, Brzezinski responded by taking credit for Shulman's role and suggesting that he was actually in charge: after all, it was he who proposed an interagency committee to Shulman, obtained his consent, and then "issued the appropriate White House instructions to create that committee."¹⁶⁹ Ultimately, even though Shulman's appointment was helpful to Vance, it signaled that the Carter administration did not have uniform, consistent, effective Soviet policies. It only appeared to assure Vance that he was Carter's number one policy aide for Soviet policy.

Carter's speech in Charleston, South Carolina on July 21, 1977 showed how Carter accommodated the perspectives of Vance and Brzezinski while tipping the balance in favor of Vance at this early point in the administration. Although Brzezinski gloated that Carter had "incorporated the U.S. initiatives I had listed for him" and had referred to "our policy of competition and cooperation,"¹⁷⁰ the tone, substance, and conclusion of the Charleston speech slightly favored Vance's views. In a statement that echoed Vance's call for always being conscious of defining the United States' interests and looking for points of cooperation with the Soviets that would advance those interests, Carter emphasized:

¹⁶⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 43.

¹⁶⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 174.

¹⁷⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 174.

As we negotiate with the Soviet Union, we will be guided by a vision of a gentler, freer and more bountiful world. But we will have no illusions about the nature of the world as it really is. The basis for complete mutual trust between us does not yet exist. Therefore, the agreements that we reach must be anchored on each side in enlightened self-interest – what’s best for us, what’s best for the Soviet Union. That’s why we search for areas of agreement where our real interests and those of the Soviets coincide.¹⁷¹

But then, Carter also referenced Brzezinski’s themes of reciprocity, human rights, and openness in negotiations – issues of linkages:

In this situation, I decided that it was time for honest discussions about international issues with the American people. I felt that it was urgent to restore the moral bearings of American foreign policy. And I felt that it was important to put the U.S. and Soviet relationship, in particular, on a more reciprocal, realistic, and, ultimately more productive basis for both nations.¹⁷²

Carter concluded, however, by returning to Vance’s focus on the overwhelming benefits of arms control:

We are trying, in a word, for genuine accommodation. But none of these proposals that I’ve outlined to you involves a sacrifice of security. All of them are meant to increase the security of both sides....Our view is that genuine progress in SALT will not merely stabilize competition in weapons, but can also provide a basis for improvement in political relations as well....What matters ultimately is whether we can create a relationship of cooperation that will be rooted in the national interests of both sides.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Jimmy Carter, "Charleston, South Carolina Remarks at the 31st Annual Meeting of the Southern Legislative Conference, July 21, 1977," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=7852>.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

Thus, one can make the case that even though Carter waffled between the themes advanced by Brzezinski and Vance in the first months of his administration, Carter ultimately showed a preference to Vance's approach to arms control. Over time Vance, who had internally supported effective policies but suffered through the failed negotiations in Moscow in March 1977, was able to recapture his reputation as the competent negotiator. As McGeorge Bundy noted, although the Carter administration "was still not able to present a clear and compelling picture of its own strategic doctrine"¹⁷⁴ as it headed into its second year, the one high point was the "slow steady progress" on SALT "that owed a great deal to the skill and tenacity of Secretary of State Vance."¹⁷⁵ However, despite Vance's persistent efforts, he never achieved his goal of moderating U.S.-Soviet tensions through a ratified arms agreement. Even though Carter and Brezhnev would ultimately sign a SALT II agreement in June 1979, the Senate did not ratify the agreement. Many factors accounted for this failure, including most particularly the need to respond to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Carter's initial deep-cut proposal, both its substance and Carter's public advocacy for it, cost the administration time and political credibility during his

¹⁷⁴ McGeorge Bundy, "High Hopes and Hard Reality: Arms Control in 1978," *Foreign Affairs* 57, no. 3: 495.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 502.

¹⁷⁶ See the discussion of the impacts of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in Chapter 8.

first year in office, and ultimately established the groundwork for a significant foreign policy failure.

By the end of the first year of his administration, Jimmy Carter had undermined Vance's foreign policy principles and his authority on several occasions. In spite of Vance's efforts to provide context and balance to the U.S. efforts to promote human rights, Carter continued to agitate for human rights in a way that Soviet leaders believed linked their internal affairs to U.S. proposals for arms control and other bilateral relations. Carter had embraced a deep-cuts arms control proposal even though Vance had presented strong arguments for finalizing the Vladivostok communiqué and then proceeding to a deep-cut proposal. Carter's publicity campaign prior to Vance's Moscow meetings seriously damaged Vance's ability to be an effective, credible negotiator. Finally, Carter's willingness to let Brzezinski not only guide the SALT debate, but also to speak out on human rights and arms control, often with incompatible messages from Vance's positions, raised questions about the coherence of administration foreign policies. Not only did Carter's actions reveal that Carter and Vance were not consistently on the same page – in substance or in style – about one of the most important foreign policy issues of the administration, but they also demonstrated that Carter did not consistently look to Vance as his prime foreign policy aide and spokesman.

CHAPTER 5. THE PROBLEM OF LINKAGE IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

Although Cyrus Vance resigned in the spring of 1980 in response to President Carter's hostage rescue mission decision, he just as easily could have resigned in the early summer of 1978. For over one year, Vance and Brzezinski rode roller coasters of changing influence with Carter over the meaning and consequences of Soviet and Cuban activity in the Horn of Africa, that is those countries on the East African peninsula that extend into the Arabian Sea and border the Gulf of Aden's southern side. For over one year, Carter gave conflicting signals about whether the U.S. commitment to arms control would be linked to Soviet behavior in the Horn. For over one year, Carter communicated mixed messages about whether he considered Vance or Brzezinski as his chief foreign policy advisor and spokesman. For over one year, Vance and Brzezinski fought privately and openly to commit Carter to their respective world views. At the conclusion of this acute policy conflict in the summer of 1978, Vance appeared to have won the battle, but the victory would prove to be incomplete and temporary.

Historical Context of the Horn of Africa Conflict

As Gaddis Smith has pointed out, “every administration since the beginning of the (African) independence movement had given lip service to the idea of supporting majority rule and insulating Africa from the competition of the Cold War....Every Administration had also watched and sought to counter the moves of the Soviet Union on the continent. The relative balance between supporting African nationalist movements and acting primarily in terms of blocking Soviet influence had oscillated from one administration to another.”¹

The United States’ attempts to thwart Soviet influence in Africa occasionally backfired. The fact that other Communist countries, such as Cuba, were involved in supporting political movements on the continent complicated U.S. policymaking and the analysis of the nature of Soviet involvement. The United States’ policymaking in 1975-1976 regarding Angola was a prime example. When civil war broke out in Angola in the spring of 1975, and Cuba began to dispatch 36,000 troops to Angola from the late fall through the spring of 1976 to support the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), Secretary of State Kissinger framed the struggle as a Cold War conflict, even though a victory by the MPLA over its competing

¹ *Smith, Morality, Reason, and Power*, 136.

independence movements “would not threaten U.S. strategic or economic interests.”²

As a result, the United States encouraged South Africa, which opposed the MPLA’s commitment to end apartheid in southern Africa, to invade Angola and to battle the MPLA and eventually the Cubans. By March 1976, the South African troops retreated after being defeated by Cuban forces. Ironically, as Henry Kissinger later discovered, Cuba “was not operating as a Soviet surrogate.”³ Although the Soviet Union clearly viewed Angola as “an ideological conflict with the United States,” and ultimately supplied the Cubans with arms, it encouraged Cuban Premier Fidel Castro to restrain Cuban involvement in an effort to “help improve our relations with the Americans.” Castro made it clear to Anatoly Dobrynin that “Angola was a Cuban show.”⁴

According to Piero Gleijeses, Castro’s primary intervention motives involved advancing racial justice: “As he (Castro) saw it, the victory of the U.S.–South African axis would have meant the victory of apartheid...” -- an outcome that Castro, whom Kissinger later called “a genuine revolutionary leader,” adamantly opposed.⁵ But U.S. officials did not view Castro as an autonomous actor. In the case of Angola, Kissinger was willing to

² Piero Gleijeses, “Moscow’s Proxy? Cuba and Africa 1975-1988,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 100.

³ Ibid., 103.

⁴ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 362-363.

⁵ Gleijeses, “Moscow’s Proxy?” 103.

sideline policy concerns about apartheid to stoke concerns about and indirectly battle supposed Soviet proxies.

The Carter administration inherited the issues related to Soviet proxies on the African continent and addressed a new set of concerns regarding instability in the Horn of Africa. Shortly after Jimmy Carter took office, the Soviet Union increased its military involvement in the long-standing territorial dispute between the Ethiopians and the Somalians regarding the Ogaden territory, which had been part of the Ethiopian empire since the late nineteenth century. As Smith further explained, Ethiopia's and Somalia's "strategic location on the flank of the Middle East, and their enmity to each other, invited a confrontation of the United States and the Soviet Union in a struggle for dominance."⁶ The question for the Carter Administration was: would the Soviet Union act "opportunistically" in the Horn as Cyrus Vance believed, or would it ultimately attempt to intervene "to choke the oil lanes on which the United States, Western Europe, and Japan were sorely dependent" -- a position advanced relentlessly by Brzezinski.⁷

The Soviet Union's involvement in the Horn compelled the United States to assess what would be an appropriate, effective response. Although the policy decisions Carter ultimately reached and implemented were generally consistent with the

⁶Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 153.

⁷Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 284.

recommendations of Secretary of State Vance, the process of getting to that point revealed fundamental weaknesses in the leadership of Jimmy Carter, fundamental inconsistencies in the world views of Brzezinski and Vance, and fundamental problems in the relationship of Vance and Carter.

In December 1976, the Soviet Union embarked upon a formal relationship with the Ethiopian regime that had led Ethiopia since Emperor Haile Selassie's overthrow in 1974. Even though the Soviet Union had a treaty of friendship with Ethiopia's neighbor and enemy Somalia since 1974, it was beginning to trust the Ethiopian regime more than the Siad Barre Somalia regime, which was intent upon supporting Eritrean separatists in Ethiopia with the expectation that Ethiopia would break up and Somalia would regain its Ogaden territory. Therefore, the Soviet leaders signed the first "basic agreement on military cooperation between the Soviet Union and Ethiopia."⁸ During May 1977, the Soviet Union signed a declaration of friendly relations in a Moscow meeting with Mengistu Haile Miriam, the military official who had lead Ethiopia since the 1974 coup. In addition, impressed somewhat with Mengistu, "embarrassed by the loss of Soviet influence in Egypt," and "flush with hard currency from Soviet exports of oil and natural gas," the Soviets provided Ethiopia with "significant aid, estimated at

⁸ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 270-271.

\$350-\$450 million.”⁹ Soon after obtaining this support, the Ethiopian Derg, a council of soldiers, embarked on a purge of suspected enemies called the “red terror.” In early 1977, the Carter administration, appalled by the human rights violations in Ethiopia, ended its grant programs, but left open the possibility of selling weapons on credit in the future. However, in April 1977, Ethiopia broke off its military assistance agreement with the United States and also expelled U.S. military missions. In response, the United States cancelled \$100 million in arms sales credits, and halted pending arms deliveries.¹⁰

Ignoring entreaties from Cuba and the Soviet Union, Somalia decided to persist in its irredentist claims in the Ogaden Desert of Ethiopia where ethnic Somalians lived. After spurning Castro’s efforts to mediate the conflict, Somalia invaded the Ogaden in July 1977.¹¹ In late November 1977, Castro “decided to send troops to Ethiopia to help repel the attacks,” “at the urgent request” of Ethiopia’s Mengistu.¹² Castro’s rationale for intervention appeared to have been that he was impressed that “a real revolution is taking place in Ethiopia. In this formal feudal empire the land has been given to the

⁹ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 273-276.

¹⁰ Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 697.

¹¹ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 274.

¹² Gleijeses, "Moscow's Proxy?", 108.

peasants.”¹³ According to Gleijeses, Castro was wrong about the “real revolution” in Ethiopia, but he and the top three Cuban officials in Ethiopia’s capital believed that reform would take place. Castro further insisted that Cuban intervention solely support the fighting against the Somalia aggressors and not be used to fight the “war of terror” taking place in Eritrea.¹⁴ Even though Cuba decided to intervene for specific, revolutionary reasons, this intervention was qualitatively different from its involvement in Angola. Gleijeses has documented that “the Soviet Union, which consulted closely with Havana throughout the operation, in contrast to Angola, where Cuba had sent its troops despite Moscow’s initial objections, welcomed the Cuban interference.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, Gleijeses’ research did not support the idea that Cuba intervened in the Horn of Africa “solely or even primarily” because of its relationship with the Soviet Union.¹⁶

In November 1977, Somalia’s Barre announced that his government “had decided to break relations with Cuba, expel all Soviet and Cuban military personnel, and close down the Soviet naval and air stations at Berbera and Mogadishu.”¹⁷

¹³ Ibid., 109.

¹⁴ Ibid., 110.

¹⁵ Ibid., 111.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 276.

Somalia then turned to the United States and U.S. allies for economic aide and military equipment. On November 10, the United States and its allies in Europe met about Horn and other issues. Vance stressed: “Until the Somalis withdrew or were driven out – which, with the influx of Soviet arms and advisors and Cuban troops, appeared to be just a question of time – there was little we or allies could do,” except to “pressure Somalia to withdraw” and to keep “lines of communication open to Ethiopia so that we would be ready to launch a mediation effort when the time was ripe.”¹⁸ The United States thus refused to provide military aid to Somalia at this time.¹⁹

By January 1978, “supported by two Cuban combat brigades and advisors with a substantial superiority in aircraft, tanks, and other arms,” Ethiopia began a successful counteroffensive.²⁰ In the middle of March 1978, the Ogaden war concluded, with Somalian forces retreating into Somalia. Sporadic Somalian guerilla activity in the Ogaden was greatly reduced. In 1978, the United States again provided economic assistance to Somalia through a reopened Agency for International Development mission, and two years later obtained access to military facilities at the port of Berbera.²¹

¹⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 74.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 282.

²⁰ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 706.

²¹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 88.

The short duration of the Horn crisis belied the longer-term issues it created for the perceived credibility and competence of the Carter administration. The process of developing and implementing the United States' approach to the crisis, particularly the consideration of whether Soviet actions in the Horn should affect the SALT negotiations, posed significant challenges to Vance's authority and relationship with Carter.

Different Views of the Strategic Importance of the Horn

Linkage, a concept that Vance believed he had buried in his direct, public efforts to extricate the SALT negotiations from Carter's human rights pronouncements, received new life during the Horn crisis. As Gaddis Smith observed, even though Jimmy Carter's inclinations were "to treat African issues on African terms, not as elements to be manipulated in a global conflict with the Soviet Union," he allowed the Cold War to intrude as the administration considered how to support Somalia against Ethiopia in the Horn.²² Interestingly, as Carter reviewed the significant issues of his administration in his memoirs, he barely focused on Soviet activity in Africa.²³ And

²² Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 133.

²³ In *Keeping Faith*, Carter referenced the Horn issues only a few times, and did not directly address the major schism between the State Department and the NSC on these issues.

yet, as Smith emphasized, “In no part of the world was the interplay of morality, reason, and power more continuous or fascinating.”²⁴

Believing that it was important to treat the Horn conflict as primarily an indigenous conflict, Vance advocated policies that were tough, but nuanced. In his memoirs, he emphasized that during the 1977-1978 period he had argued that it was in the United States’ interests to “prevent the Soviets from increasing their political influence in the Horn of Africa.”²⁵ Vance had advocated maintaining a relationship with Ethiopia, and at the same time strengthening the relationship with Somalia. However, he had clarified that it would be “naïve” to be hostile openly to Ethiopia or to support Somalia in an uncritical way. Vance was aware that the Somalian regime might attempt to seize the Ogaden, which actually occurred in the summer of 1977, and if the United States signaled in any way support for that invasion, “we would find ourselves inadvertently on the wrong side of Africa’s most cherished principles – the territorial integrity of postcolonial states.”²⁶

Consistent with this position, once the Somalians had invaded the Ogaden, Vance recommended to Carter that the United States should neither supply defensive weapons to the Somalians, as had been agreed upon earlier in principle, nor encourage other

²⁴ Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 133.

²⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 72.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

countries to supply arms until Somalia had withdrawn from the Ogaden. As Vance stressed, he and the State Department experts on Africa believed that the Horn was a “textbook case of Soviet exploitation of a local conflict,”²⁷ and that Soviet actions in Africa were not “part of a grand Soviet plan, but rather attempts to exploit targets of opportunity.”²⁸ In fact, Ambassador Dobrynin agreed with Vance’s perspective: “I can say with confidence that Vance was right in the sense that the Kremlin had no far-reaching global plans in that region. But having suffered no major international complications because of its interference in Angola, Moscow had no scruples about escalating its activities in other countries.”²⁹ Dobrynin further suggested that the Soviets made “a serious mistake in involving ourselves in the conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia.” Dobrynin reflected: “I cannot help being surprised at the amount of energy and effort spent almost entirely in vain by Moscow and Washington on these so-called African affairs.”³⁰

Vance’s advocacy of a limited, measured response in the Horn did not signify that he was unconcerned by Soviet actions, but rather that “realism required us to deal

²⁷ Ibid., 74.

²⁸ Ibid., 84.

²⁹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 403-404.

³⁰ Ibid., 407.

with those problems in the local context in which they had their roots.”³¹ Vance recommended a strategy that included diplomacy, coordinated responses by Western allies, and appeals to African nationalism to resolve local disputes to discourage Soviet involvement. In addition, Vance “did not rule out the careful application of military pressure.” Yet, he qualified this option:

Still, I was convinced it was wrong to threaten or bluff in a case where military involvement was not justified, or where Congress and the American people would not support it. It made no sense to attempt to bluff when we were not prepared to carry out the threat. In my judgment, the Horn of Africa was precisely such a case.³²

Throughout the late winter of 1977 and spring of 1978, Vance vigorously opposed Brzezinski’s advocacy of countering Soviet and Cuban support to Ethiopia by slowing the SALT negotiations. Instead, Vance and NATO allies talked to the Soviets about the difficulties they were creating for the United States’ efforts to follow a balanced policy, and received Soviet assurances that they would attempt to restrain the Ethiopians, just as the United States would attempt to restrain the Somalians.³³ Vance’s rationale for opposing linkage was two-fold: “First, most of the suggested actions would adversely affect American interests. Second, these steps would probably have little or no effect

³¹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 85.

³² *Ibid.*, 84-85.

³³ *Ibid.*, 85.

on Soviet actions in the Horn.”³⁴ Thus, Vance’s approach to the Horn, which entailed asking what responses would be in the interest of the United States and what responses would be effective, was consistent with the way he approached many foreign policy crises.

Gaddis Smith succinctly observed: “Brzezinski could not have disagreed with Vance more.”³⁵ Indeed, Brzezinski acknowledged that the Horn was a “source of friction between Vance and me.”³⁶ To justify his view that “the situation between the Ethiopians and the Somalis was more than a border conflict,”³⁷ Brzezinski resurrected the rationale inherent in the domino theory, one of the major justifications for U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. Without providing documentation that Soviet influence in Ethiopia could realistically spread to neighboring countries, he asserted that the “unsettled situation was of serious concern to Egypt, the Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Iran and us, because we all had evidence that the Soviets were providing increased aid and using Cuban forces in the already tense border war.”³⁸ Acknowledging the difficulties involved in supporting Somalia, which was clearly the aggressor in the border war,

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 148.

³⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 178.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

Brzezinski still argued that “the vital interests of the United States were involved and the nation must act accordingly.”³⁹ Brzezinski asserted:

Coupled with the expansion of Soviet influence and military presence to South Yemen, it posed a potentially grave threat to our position in the Middle East, notably in the Arabian peninsula. It represented a serious setback in our attempts to develop with the Soviets some rules of the game in dealing with turbulence in the Third World. The Soviets had earlier succeeded in sustaining, through the Cubans, their preferred solution in Angola, and they now seemed embarked on a repetition in a region in close proximity to our most sensitive interests.⁴⁰

Brzezinski fed his positions on the Horn to the media, and lobbied Carter to adopt his recommendations on Horn policy. He apparently had some support from Carter’s political advisors who told the president that the Horn issues complicated his ability to get Senate approval for a SALT treaty. According to Leffler, Brzezinski “tirelessly warned Carter that domestic support for his foreign policy goals was fading.”⁴¹ He pointed out that conservatives were blasting Carter for cancelling the B-1 bomber, for the Panama Canal treaty, for his overtures to China, and most of all, for being willing to bargain with the Soviets over SALT.⁴²

Brzezinski also maintained that his perceptions were widely shared in the international community. Buttressing his position with Carter, Brzezinski observed that

³⁹ Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 153.

⁴⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 178.

⁴¹ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 281.

⁴² Ibid.

the leaders of France and Egypt agreed with his perspective, because they had a “refined strategic perspective” – apparently unlike Vance and Harold Brown who disagreed with him.⁴³ In fact, as Brzezinski later noted, no one at the highest levels of government agreed with him: “throughout the late fall of 1977 and much of 1978, I was very much alone in the U.S. government in advocating a stronger response.”⁴⁴ Brzezinski later charged that the failure to respond aggressively to Soviet and Cuban activity in the Horn influenced the Soviet Union’s decision to invade Afghanistan in December 1979, and resulted in Carter’s withdrawal of the SALT treaty from Senate consideration.⁴⁵

The Early Battles of the Horn Policy War

Even though Brzezinski was alone in his advocacy of linkage related to the Horn of Africa, he continued to promote linkage -- privately and publicly -- from the summer of 1977 through the summer of 1978. Why did he not back off when time and time again the Policy Review Committee (PRC) of the National Security Council decided that Soviet activities in the Horn were not linked to U.S. strategic interests in arms control? One explanation is that Jimmy Carter did not demand that he stop the

⁴³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 179.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ George Urban, “A Conversation with Zbigniew Brzezinski,” 28.

campaign for linkage. Instead of clarifying the U.S. position regarding linkage and clarifying Vance's authority as foreign policy spokesman during this period, Carter did just the opposite: he muddled the U.S. position and undermined Vance's authority. The fact that Carter ultimately embraced more of Vance's position than Brzezinski's position was meaningful, but the process of getting to that point exacerbated the negative perceptions of Carter's unfocused leadership and undermined Vance's credibility.

Throughout the first year of the Carter administration, Brzezinski aggressively attempted to define U.S. policy regarding the Soviet Union's activities in the Horn of Africa. It would be more accurate to say that Brzezinski sought to redefine U.S. policy because at this time Jimmy Carter generally agreed with Vance that Soviet actions in Africa revealed more an "unceasing probing for advantage" than a "Soviet master plan for world domination."⁴⁶ Prior to the initiation of the Ethiopian-Somali conflict in March 1977, Brzezinski stated that he supported Carter establishing a PRC, chaired by the State Department, to "undertake a review of U.S. African policies."⁴⁷ Although the review focused on issues of immediate concern related to Kenya and the Sudan, it also examined "prospects for loosening Somalia's ties with the Soviet Union," as well as "the consequences of increased Soviet, East European and Cuban support for the

⁴⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 28.

⁴⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 179.

military government.”⁴⁸ The conclusions of this extensive, thorough process were not entirely consistent with Brzezinski’s views. The PRC’s report stated: “Militarily the Horn is not of great strategic importance to the United States.”⁴⁹ The sole exception to this view was held by the Department of Defense which maintained that U.S. interests in the Horn were strategic, “reflecting the area’s proximity to the Middle East oil fields, the sea oil routes and the Red Sea passage to the Mediterranean.”⁵⁰ The Presidential Review Memorandum (PRM) that emerged from the study analyzed options for dealing with the developments in Ethiopia, for consolidating the U.S. position in neighboring countries, and for advancing the U.S. position in Somalia. Significantly, linkage did not rear its head in this memo, which contained no suggestions that Soviet actions in the Horn should affect U.S. arms control policy. The PRM stated: first, that “the U.S. position in Ethiopia will continue to decline over the short term”; and second, the U.S. needed to decide whether a relationship with Somalia was likely feasible and

⁴⁸ Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Presidential Review Memorandum, NSC-21, March 17, 1977,” *The National Security Archive*, http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com/cgi=bin cqcgi?CQ_Session_Key.

⁴⁹ Policy Review Committee, “Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC-21, The Horn of Africa, April 1, 1977,” *The National Security Archive*, http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com/cgi=bin cqcgi?CQ_Session_Key.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

“sufficiently durable to warrant a positive response from us to Somali military and economic aid requests.”⁵¹

Brzezinski was not pleased that the committee did not “advocate further action” other than calling for a number of measures to “react adversely to the Soviet-sponsored Cuban military presence.”⁵² Brzezinski had unsuccessfully prodded the committee to address: “Should we attempt to link movement in the trade area to progress on other issues? Should the linkages be to internal issues in the Soviet Union (e.g., emigration, human rights) or to Soviet external behavior (e.g., their policies and actions in the Middle East, Africa, etc.)”⁵³

While Brzezinski was attempting to raise or to change the definition of the strategic significance of the Horn of Africa, Vance continued to articulate the policies that he believed that Carter and he had agreed to at the inception of the administration -- policies that he believed continued to be appropriate and relevant. At a May 1977 news conference, Vance was asked: “What is your assessment of U.S. relations in eastern Africa, and are you concerned about the Communist influence there, particularly in the

⁵¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Memorandum to Vice President, Secretary of State, et al., PRC Meeting on U.S. Soviet Economic Relations, August 31, 1977,” *Declassified Documents Reference System (Galenet)*, <http://0-galenet-galegroup.com.library.lausys.lausys:georgetown.edu/servelet/DDRS?>

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

Horn?” In response, Vance referred to the Horn study underway, reiterated from previous announcements that the U.S. was reducing its Ethiopian military assistance mission, and was working in concert with other countries in the area. His tone was one of concern and moderation.⁵⁴

In July 1977, Vance delivered an address in St. Louis, Missouri to clarify African policy. Vance provided his – and the administration’s – rationale for its approach to Soviet and Cuban involvement in Africa: “We proceed from a basic proposition: that our policies must recognize the unique identity of Africa. We can be neither right nor effective if we treat Africa simply as one part of the Third World, or as a testing ground of East-West competition.”⁵⁵ Vance also emphasized that “the most effective policies toward Africa are affirmative policies” that help to resolve problems before they “create opportunities for external intervention.”⁵⁶ On the other hand, Vance forcefully condemned the increase of Soviet and Cuban personnel in Africa:

All sides should be aware that when outside powers pour substantial quantities of arms and military personnel into Africa, it greatly enhances the danger that disputes will be resolved militarily rather than through mediation by African

⁵⁴ Cyrus Vance, “Secretary Vance’s May 4, 1977 News Conference,” *Department of State Bulletin*, Volume 77, May 23, 1977, 519-520.

⁵⁵ Cyrus Vance, “Our Policies Must Recognize the Unique Identity of Africa. Address before the Annual Convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, St. Louis, Missouri,” Document 608, *American Foreign Policy*, 1977-1980, 1131.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

states....This danger is particularly great in the Horn, where there has been an escalation of arms transfers from the outside. The current difficulties in Ethiopia, and the tensions among nations in the area, present complex diplomatic challenges.⁵⁷

And then Vance reiterated U.S. policy – a tough, nuanced policy that in no way linked Soviet actions in the Horn to the U.S-Soviet strategic relationship: “In accordance with the policy recently announced by the President, arms transfers to Africa will be an exceptional tool of our policy and will be used only after the most careful consideration.”⁵⁸ Vance explained that the United States would “consider sympathetically appeals for assistance from states which are threatened by a build-up of foreign military equipment and advisors on their borders, in the Horn and elsewhere in Africa.” He emphasized, however, that the U.S. hoped that “local arms races and the consequent dangers of deepening outside involvement can be limited.”⁵⁹

During the fall of 1977, Vance adhered to and advocated for this Horn policy in public, in private conversations with Carter, and in private conversations with Soviet counterparts. For example, prior to a Carter meeting with Andrei Gromyko in the fall of 1977, Vance encouraged Carter to point out to Gromyko that the United States was making a concerted effort to keep “East-West rivalry out of Africa; this can only

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

complicate solutions and strain our bilateral relations. In particular, we would not want the Horn to become a site of great power conflict.”⁶⁰

Disagreeing with Vance’s messages regarding Horn policy, Brzezinski began to question and to undermine Vance’s positions, both privately and publicly.

Significantly, even though Carter agreed with Vance’s approach to the Horn, he allowed Brzezinski to brief the media on the “growing Soviet-Cuban military presence.”⁶¹

Brzezinski even dined with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin in December 1977, warned him “quite flat out that continued influx of Cubans and of Soviet war material to Ethiopia would make us alter our position from that of restraint to that of more active involvement,” and hinted that accommodations on SALT would be influenced by Soviet behavior in the Horn.⁶² Brzezinski seemed pleased that his press backgrounders resulted in the media focusing more on the “growing escalation of the Communist military efforts.”⁶³ He was particularly gratified that Carter “started referring more frequently to this issue in his public comments, in an effort to make the Soviets more sensitive to the proposition that their conduct was not compatible with the notion of

⁶⁰ Cyrus R. Vance, “Memorandum for the President on Your Meeting with Gromyko, September 20, 1977,” *Declassified Documents Reference System*, <http://0-galenet.galegroup.com.library.lausys.georgetown.edu/serv1>.

⁶¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 180.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 179-180.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 180.

mutual restraint.”⁶⁴

As 1977 drew to a close, Vance realized that that “there was growing public and congressional concern about Soviet international behavior” and that this would affect the policymaking process.⁶⁵ However, Vance also pointed out that much of that concern “arose from background press sessions held by staff members of the national security advisor and was self-inflicted.”⁶⁶ Vance further emphasized that he believed, from conversations with Soviet officials, that the Soviet Union’s support of Ethiopia had limits. From a meeting Vance held with Gromyko on December 12, he ascertained that the Soviet Union was not going to support an Ethiopian invasion of Somalia. Gromyko assured him: “We talked about that at a sufficiently high level with the Ethiopians. They don’t have any plan to invade Somalia.”⁶⁷ Vance also impressed upon Gromyko that the U.S. “had made clear” to the Somalis “that we would not provide them” with arms “as long as the present conflict in Ogaden lasted,” and stressed that “the African countries considered this an African problem and wanted the major

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 84.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Cyrus Vance, “Cyrus Vance, to Zbigniew Brzezinski, December 12, 1977,” *Declassified Documents Reference System*, [http://www.ddrs.psmedia.com/tplweb-cgi/f...+615797\('Brzezinski' + Iran'\):text](http://www.ddrs.psmedia.com/tplweb-cgi/f...+615797('Brzezinski' + Iran'):text).

powers to disengage.”⁶⁸ So, Vance had reason to believe that the Horn crisis would not escalate, and that although the Soviet Union would continue to support Ethiopia, it would restrain Ethiopia from invading Somalia.

During the first year of the Carter administration, Brzezinski had advocated an aggressive policy in the Horn, and supported linking the U.S.-Soviet strategic relationship to Soviet activity in the Horn. The fact that the other foreign policy principals did not agree with him about linkage or the nature of the Horn conflict apparently did not matter. By advancing his perspective in media backgrounders and in talks with Soviet officials, Brzezinski had begun to undermine not only Vance’s authority but also existing U.S. policy. And so, the Horn policy war entered a new phase – one with far more debilitating consequences.

An All-Out, Internal Policy Battle

From mid January 1978 until early June 1978, Brzezinski and Vance fought an acrimonious policy battle about the strategic significance of the Horn of Africa. As Vance observed, at the beginning of 1978, the administration’s position on the Horn of Africa was essentially unchanged from positions developed in the first year of the administration, positions consistent with his belief that the United States should

⁶⁸ Ibid.

generally treat the conflict as a localized, African conflict.⁶⁹ Brzezinski, however, refused to accept Horn policy as a given, and deliberately, aggressively attacked it with the support of NSC staff. Again, Carter did not restrain his activities.

After Ethiopia initiated its counteroffensive with the support of Cuban brigades in January 1978, Brzezinski started “convening frequent SCC meetings on the grounds that the issue was gradually escalating into a crisis,”⁷⁰ and tasked his staff with building a case for a policy of greater involvement in the Horn and a policy of linkage. In the memos NSC staffer Paul B. Henze prepared for Brzezinski, Henze supported Vance’s contention that the United States could only support Somalia if it abandoned its aggression in the Ogaden, but also defined the conflict as one provoked and maintained by the Soviet Union, a conflict that at its core was not a localized, African conflict.

Henze’s first Horn memo to Brzezinski on January 12, 1978 reviewed the complexity of the Horn conflict, and argued that at its core it was a détente conflict concerning the relationship of the United States and the Soviet Union. Suggesting that the Soviets were attempting to capitalize on U.S weaknesses “in the wake of Watergate and Angola,” Henze observed:

I have become increasingly inclined to believe that the most basic reason the Soviets opted for Ethiopia over Somalia and moved in with tanks, MIGs and

⁶⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 85.

⁷⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 181.

Cubans was the irresistible appeal of replacing the United States in a major country where we had been predominant since World War II.⁷¹

Henze discounted the Soviet desire to “move into Ethiopia” in order to “outflank Egypt, punish the Somalis, cut off Red Sea shipping or dominate the Indian Ocean.” Instead, he characterized these possible Soviet goals as just “enticements.” He cautioned that the U.S. should not underestimate the Soviet’s psychological goal of pointing out that the United States lacked “the will and the capacity to counteract what they are doing.”⁷² Henze’s analysis buttressed Brzezinski’s overall perspective that the Horn issues were not simply localized issues. Henze also posed the dilemma of how and whether the United States could respond effectively:

We have already put ourselves in the position of agitating about problems in the Horn but being seen as powerless to do much about them. The noise we make thus serves only to underscore our inability to have impact on the situation. By making noise, we generate domestic and even foreign pressures for action that we may find difficult to cope with. I am not saying that we should not make noise, but we must keep the implications in mind.⁷³

In follow-up memos to Brzezinski also written in January 1978, Henze revisited the dilemma of how to undertake effective action by proposing:

⁷¹ Paul B. Henze, “Realities and Lessons of History in the Horn of Africa, January 12, 1978,” *Declassified Documents Reference System*, http://www.ddrs.psmedia.com/tplweb-cgi/fastweb?getdoc+ddrs_im.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

Much as we want the Soviets out, we are not going to get them out soon....We should make their stay as costly as possible and the source of fundamental strain for them...We can do this in many ways, both overtly covertly...The Soviets are the culprits in the Horn and we should never let them or the world forget it.⁷⁴

Henze further expressed that he was “extremely skeptical that here at home we could ever get support for an active interventionist policy on the side of the Somalis against the Soviets and Cubans in the Horn,” and moreover suggested that any interventionist moves on behalf of Somalia would undermine the U.S. position.⁷⁵ Instead, he argued that the U.S. should counter the Soviet suspicion that “in this post-Watergate and post-Vietnam era the U.S. lacks the will to defend its interests in distant parts of the world” by “persevering in the political sphere,” which implied linking the U.S. strategic relationship with the Soviet Union to Soviet behavior in Africa.⁷⁶

Throughout February 1978, as the Somalis desperately appealed for U.S. military aid to counter increasing Ethiopian and Cuban pressure, the SCC under Brzezinski met frequently to deliberate Horn issues, and Vance initiated discussions

⁷⁴ Paul B. Henze, “Fundamentals in the Horn of Africa Situation, January 16, 1978,” *Declassified Documents Reference System*, http://www.ddrs.psmedia.com/tplweb-cgi/fastweb?getdoc+ddrs_im.

⁷⁵ Paul B. Henze, “Where Do We Stand on the Horn? January 21, 1978,” *Declassified Documents Reference System*, http://www.ddrs.psmedia.com/tplweb-cgi/fastweb?getdoc+ddrs_im.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

with NATO allies and “quiet contacts” with his Soviet counterparts.⁷⁷ Vance believed that a cohesive administration policy was beginning to take place that included: working with NATO to prevent an invasion of Somalia and to tamp down Soviet and Cuban influence in the Horn; ensuring that Sudan, Iran, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia also embraced these goals; applying increased pressure on Somalia to withdraw from the Ogaden; establishing the foundation to provide diplomatic, political, and defensive arms support to Somalia – after it withdrew from the Ogaden; and finally, maintaining pressure on the Soviet Union to prevent an Ethiopian and Cuban invasion of Somalia and to support a negotiated settlement. Furthermore, Vance felt satisfied by the assurances provided by Ambassador Dobrynin during a February 14 meeting that Moscow, conditional on Somalia’s withdrawal from the Ogaden, would “support a cease-fire in conjunction with Somali withdrawal, peace negotiations, and the territorial integrity of both states.”⁷⁸

While the administration appeared to be settling on a comprehensive strategy for dealing with the Horn, Brzezinski worked to undercut that evolving strategy by advocating that the United States put an American aircraft carrier task force near Ethiopia “to send a strong message to the Soviets” and to “provide more tangible

⁷⁷ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 86.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

backing for our strong words.”⁷⁹ During a February 10, 1978 meeting of the SCC, Brzezinski made the case for such a deployment. The SCC, however, did not support Brzezinski, and decided only to keep a carrier task force at Subic Bay for “convenient deployment to the Horn area if this becomes desirable. Meanwhile, a non-carrier naval task force will proceed into the Indian Ocean as long scheduled, on 20 February. Movement of it toward the Horn area will be reviewed at a later date.”⁸⁰

Encountering almost total opposition to his proposal, Brzezinski nevertheless relentlessly pushed for the deployment of a carrier task force. Both Harold Brown and Vance responded by pushing back. Brzezinski observed: “Vance particularly was against any deployment of a carrier task for in the area of the Horn. For the first time in the course of our various meetings, he started to show impatience, to get red in the face, and to raise his voice. I could sense that personal tension was entering into our relationship.”⁸¹ Vance was indeed convinced that Brzezinski’s approach was terribly wrong, dangerous, and counterproductive, and fought to commit Carter to the SCC’s decision.⁸²

⁷⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 182.

⁸⁰ Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Special Coordination Committee Meeting, Subject, Horn of Africa, February 10, 1978,” *Declassified Documents Reference System*, <http://0-galenet.galegroup.com.library.lausys.lausys:georgetown.edu/servelet/DDRS>.

⁸¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 182.

⁸² Vance, *Hard Choices*, 84-88.

With the issue decided against him, Brzezinski continued to work to reverse the decision. In SCC meetings on February 21-23, Brzezinski argued for U.S. military countermoves, including the deployment of a carrier task force to the Horn region and the encouragement of other friendly countries to supply Somalia with weapons, a position fundamentally at odds with U.S. policy. And again, Brzezinski, who contended that a carrier force would simply convey U.S. seriousness and not a willingness to step into a fight, did not prevail. Vance, Brown, Vice President Mondale, and Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Richard Moose opposed the deployment of a carrier force.⁸³ Vance asserted that neither he nor Brown thought it advisable to “engage in a bluffing game. If our bluff were called and we were not prepared to use our planes, the credibility of future carrier task force deployments in crises would be compromised.”⁸⁴

Vance was pleased that these meetings concluded with “agreement that there would be no linkage between the Soviets’ and Cubans’ activities in the Horn and other bilateral issues between the United States and the USSR.”⁸⁵ The transcripts of these meetings, however, disclosed that Brzezinski and his staffer David Aaron had promoted a policy of linkage, both with respect to SALT and with respect to developing a

⁸³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principles*, 183.

⁸⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 87.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

relationship with China to tweak the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the substance and tone of Brzezinski's and Vance's input into these meetings could not have been more different. Brzezinski advocated hitting the Soviet Union through expanding the relationship with China and getting "the regional powers to act and make the Soviets and Cubans bleed."⁸⁶ Vance cautioned about viewing Somalia as a "friend" that the United States was potentially "letting down" by not supplying weapons, and emphasized that he "would not put any U.S. troops in Africa."⁸⁷

The fact that Vance's position prevailed was important from Vance's perspective, but the differences in the views between the secretary of state and the national security advisor -- and the fact that the national security advisor did not seem to accept the consensus of the group -- were alarming. The presidential directive that Brzezinski issued on behalf of Carter to summarize U.S. policy toward the Horn -- NSC-32 -- revealed that Brzezinski did not consider the issue closed. The directive reflected Vance's position that "should Somalia agree to announce and implement a decision to withdraw from the Ogaden, the United States would be prepared to initiate Congressional consultations to authorize third country arms transfers of defensive U.S.-origin weapons to Somalia," but also stated that "The President did not approve *at this*

⁸⁶ Robert Gates, "Notes from Special Coordination Committee on the Horn of Africa Meeting, February 22, 1978," *Declassified Documents Reference System*, [http://www.ddrs.psmedia.com/tplweb-cgi/f...+414204+++\('Brzezinski'+and+'Iran'\):text](http://www.ddrs.psmedia.com/tplweb-cgi/f...+414204+++('Brzezinski'+and+'Iran'):text).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

time (emphasis added) the deployment of a United States aircraft carrier into the area but indicated willingness to consider moving a carrier closer to the area -- for example, Diego Garcia.”⁸⁸ Brzezinski’s addition of “at this time” suggested that the issue was in limbo. Furthermore, Brzezinski included a section on publicity and congressional consultations that he would use to become an administration mouthpiece for Horn policies, but not necessarily the policies supported by the SCC:

The United States should undertake efforts to publicize more widely the Soviet and Cuban role in Ethiopia... We also should ensure that key U.S. allies... understand the situation in the Horn and collectively deplore the Soviet and Cuban role in Ethiopia. Consultations with the Congress are to begin to ensure complete understanding on the part of the Congress with respect to the role of Soviets and Cubans in Ethiopia, and the strategic and political implications of their role...⁸⁹

Linkage and the Public Battle

Having fought an unsuccessful battle to link formally U.S. Horn policy to the U.S.-Soviet strategic relationship, Brzezinski then moved the battle to the public arena. Significantly, Carter, by allowing Brzezinski to speak out on linkage and by incorporating some of Brzezinski’s language in presidential media statements and

⁸⁸ Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Zbigniew Brzezinski, to The Vice President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Director of the Central Intelligence, Presidential Directive/NSC-32, February 24, 1978,” *Declassified Documents Reference System*, <http://www.ddrs.psmedia.com/tplweb-cgi/f>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

speeches, not only violated his agreement with Vance about who would speak for the administration, but also undermined administration policies. While Brzezinski's actions were consistent with his beliefs about the nature of Soviet power and his code of professional behavior, Carter's actions appeared to be driven by political considerations. Indeed, according to public opinion polls about Carter's performance, his approval rating had declined substantially during the peak of the Horn crisis. At the beginning of January 1978, 55 percent of those surveyed in the Gallup poll approved of Carter's performance, with 27 percent disapproving. By the beginning of July 1978, Carter's approval rating had plummeted to 40 percent, with 41 percent of those polled expressing disapproval.⁹⁰ Right wing members of the Democratic Party were also criticizing him for indecisiveness about U.S. strategy in the Horn of Africa. In March 1978, Senator Henry M. Jackson "likened Administration actions on developments there, particularly the question of Cuban and Soviet aid for Ethiopia, to a state of 'abulia,' an inability to make a decision."⁹¹ Thus, Brzezinski's public battle for linkage revealed not only that Carter's views were unpredictable and malleable, but also called into question which advisor truly had the confidence of the president.

⁹⁰ This was an overall rating that included public reaction to domestic issues. Gallup Poll, "Presidential Approval Polls," *Roper Center Public Opinion Archives*, 1977-1979, <http://0-www.ropercenter.unconn.edu/library.lausys.geo>.

⁹¹ Steven Rattner, "Jackson Criticizes Carter's Moves on Foreign and Domestic Matters," *The New York Times*, March 15, 1978, sec. A, p. 8.

Brzezinski's public battle for linkage began on March 1, 1978 when he joined Vice President Mondale at a media briefing. A reporter questioned Brzezinski about whether Soviet aid to Ethiopia would affect SALT deliberations, and Brzezinski responded with a message that contravened Presidential Directive/NSC-32, referenced above:

We are not imposing any linkage, but linkages may be imposed by unwarranted exploitation of local conflict for larger international purposes...it is only a matter of realistic judgment to conclude that if tensions were to rise...then that will inevitably complicate the context not only of the negotiating process itself but also of any ratification that would follow the successful conclusion of negotiation.⁹²

From comments Carter made at a news conference the next day, it appeared that he supported both Vance's and Brzezinski's perspective on linkage. In response to a question posed by Warren Rogers of *The New York Tribune* about strains in the U.S.-Soviet relationship and Soviet activity in the Horn, Carter provided a two-part statement that first stipulated that there was no linkage between Soviet activity in the Horn and SALT negotiations, and then concluded with a statement that suggested that there might be a perceived connection that was in effect linkage. Carter first stressed:

The SALT talks have never been discontinued or delayed. They are ongoing now, and the Soviet involvement in the Horn has not interrupted that process. We do not initiate any Government policy that has a linkage between the Soviet

⁹² Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 185.

involvement in the Ethiopia-Somalia dispute on the one hand and SALT or the comprehensive test ban negotiations on the other.⁹³

Carter then emphasized that Foreign Minister Gromyko had assured him that the Ethiopians would not invade Somalia, and stated that if the Ethiopians invaded Somalia and if the Soviet and Cuban troops were not removed from Ethiopia that it

...would be a cause of concern to me, would lessen the confidence of the American people in the word and peaceful intentions of the Soviet Union, would make it more difficult to ratify a SALT agreement or comprehensive test ban agreement if concluded, and therefore the two are linked because of actions by the Soviets. We don't initiate the linkage.⁹⁴

The day of Carter's news conference, Vance appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and deliberately clarified that the administration had not "linked the fate of strategic arms limitation talks with the Soviet Union to its concern about the Soviet and Cuban military involvement in the Horn of Africa."⁹⁵ Although he noted that rising tensions could "inevitably complicate the process" of reaching a SALT agreement, Vance emphasized: "I think it is in the national interest to proceed with the SALT talks...A sound agreement is in the national interest and also in the interest of

⁹³ Jimmy Carter, "The President's News Conference of March 2, 1978," *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?p_id=30437.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ "Vance Denies SALT Is Tied to Horn Activity," *The Washington Post*, March 3, 1978, sec. A, p. 26.

our allies.”⁹⁶ In making this statement, Vance had articulated what was the administration’s policy. In making his statement at the news conference, Carter had appeared to modify that policy.

The news reports of March 2-3, 1978 highlighted the divergent statements on linkage, the developing schism between Vance and Brzezinski, and Brzezinski’s apparent new status as an administration spokesman. Murray Marder of *The Washington Post* asserted that the “White House for the first time yesterday directly tied the fate of the strategic nuclear arms negotiations with the Soviet Union to the concerted administration concern with the Soviet and Cuban military presence in the Horn of Africa,” and characterized Brzezinski as “the principal administration alarm-sounder on Soviet action in the Horn.”⁹⁷ In a critical editorial about the “unnecessary, even foolish” shortcomings of linkage and the importance of not letting SALT be “hostage to the Ethiopian dispute,” a *Washington Post* editorial lamented: “Linkage is back, kind of, under the patronage of Zbigniew Brzezinski, seconded yesterday by his chief, Jimmy Carter.”⁹⁸ And, Bernard Gwertzman of *The New York Times* wrote that the Carter administration’s comments about the Horn made it seem that Brzezinski was

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Murray Marder, "U.S. Links SALT to Horn of Africa," *The Washington Post*, March 2, 1978, sec. A, p. 1.

⁹⁸ Editorial, "Son of Linkage," *The Washington Post*, March 3, 1978, sec. A, p. 22.

tougher than Vance, that Carter was favoring the advice of Brzezinski more than Vance, and alluded to the concerns of the State Department and Vance that “Mr. Brzezinski has gone too far in his comments.”⁹⁹

Vance was extremely concerned about the effects of Brzezinski’s comments.

He recalled:

We were shooting ourselves in the foot. By casting the complex Horn situation in East-West terms and by setting impossible objectives for U.S. policy -- elimination of Soviet and Cuban influence in Ethiopia -- we were creating a perception that we were defeated when, in fact, we were achieving a successful outcome...We needed to be more consistent in explaining the purposes of our policies or we would end in creating public uncertainty and confusion.¹⁰⁰

The near-verbatim summary notes of Vance’s exchanges with Brzezinski (ZB) and Harold Brown (HB) during an SCC meeting on the Horn on March 2 not only document that he was furious, but moreover that he and Brzezinski disagreed on the vital importance of SALT and the strategic nature of the Horn conflict -- issues that Vance had rightly assumed had been resolved during the February SCC meetings and Carter’s issuance of a presidential directive on the Horn. Now Brzezinski, after having made his case for linkage the day before publicly, was provoking yet another internal policy discussion of an already-decided issue:

⁹⁹ Bernard Gwertzman, "Top Carter Aides Seen in Discord on How to React to Soviet Actions," *New York Times*, March 3, 1978, sec. A, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 88.

CV: I want you to know what I said in hearings before Congress yesterday. I was asked, 'Is there linkage between what is going on in the Horn and SALT?' I replied, 'There is not.' I did have to recognize that what is happening could affect the political atmosphere. I made a speech for about two minutes on the importance of SALT...

ZB: The President said in response to a question this noon that there is no linkage but Soviet actions may impose such linkage....

CV: That is wrong. I think it is wrong to say that this is going to produce linkage, and it is of fundamental importance....

ZB: It is going to poison the atmosphere....

CV: We will end up losing SALT and that will be the worst thing that could happen. If we do not get a SALT treaty in the President's first four years, that will be a blemish on his record forever....

ZB: It will be a blemish on his record also if a treaty gets rejected by the Senate....

CV: Zbig, you yesterday and the President today said it may create linkage and I think it is wrong to say that...

ZB: What we are saying is that if there is an aggravation of tensions because of what the Soviets are doing in the Horn, there is going to be linkage. That is a statement of fact...

HB: Not all statements of fact should be made...

ZB: The Soviets should be made aware of the fact that they are poisoning the atmosphere...

HB: We should find something else to beat the Soviets with...

CV: I do not think there is much leverage anyway on this issue....

CV: I think the key still remains SALT. If we make progress on SALT, then a lot of things will fall into place that do not fall into place otherwise...

ZB: They must understand that there are consequences in their behavior. If we do not react, we are destroying our own posture – regionally and internationally and we are creating the conditions for domestic reaction.

CV: This is where you and I part. The consequences of doing something like this are very dangerous...

ZB: The Soviets are demonstrating a predisposition to exploit a local conflict for larger purposes. They are frightening more countries in the region and they are creating a precedent for more involvement elsewhere.¹⁰¹

With the private debate becoming a public debate among the foreign policy principals, the media focused in the spring of 1978 on how the linkage issue was driving a wedge between Vance and Brzezinski with Carter occupying a muddying, middle position. Even though the immediate Horn conflict was essentially over with Somalia's withdrawal from the Ogaden in the middle of March, the linkage battle -- and the bureaucratic battles -- persisted. Administration observers expressed concerns that the administration lacked focus and consistency. Murray Marder of the *Washington Post*, for example, revealed that State Department officials described Brzezinski's public pronouncements about linkage as "about as effective as shooting yourself in the foot."¹⁰² Arguing that "the record of trying to apply linkage on SALT is one of failure," Marder also revealed that foreign policy team appeared to be in three camps: the anti-

¹⁰¹ "Transcript, SCC Meeting on Horn of Africa, March 2, 1978," *Declassified Documents Reference System*, http://www.ddrs.psmedia.com/tplweb-cgi/fastweb?getdoc+ddrs_im.

¹⁰² Murray Marder, "Linkage Bares a Rift in Detente Strategy," *The Washington Post*, March 6, 1978, sec. A, p. 1.

linkage proponents included Vance, Paul Warnke, Marshall Shulman, and Brown; the linkage proponents included Brzezinski and certain NSC staffers; and President Carter appeared to waffle between Vance's and Brzezinski's position, with him possibly coming out closer to Brzezinski's position.¹⁰³

Another *Washington Post* writer, Jim Hoagland, suggested that "Zbig" was "coming out," that is, coming out with critical messages about the Soviet Union with "bite" and coming out as Carter's most influential foreign policy aide.¹⁰⁴ Hoagland further portrayed high-level officials at the State Department as being alarmed that Brzezinski insisted on "drawing lines against the Soviets in distant places like the Horn of Africa" for fear that he was creating a "self-fulfilling prophecy."¹⁰⁵ Moreover, observing that Brzezinski's proximity to Carter was a source of tremendous power and influence, Hoagland revealed that State Department officials feared that Brzezinski was "trying to use his advocacy of a tougher approach to expand his bureaucratic power, at State's expense."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Jim Hoagland, "Brzezinski. An Eagerness to Show Resolve," *The New York Times*, March 14, 1978, sec. A, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

The administration's response to the negative critiques was to have the president, once and for all, delineate U.S policy toward the Soviet Union. On March 17, 1978, Carter delivered an address at Wake Forest University intended in part to provide this much needed clarification.¹⁰⁷ The tone of Carter's speech was tough. Carter castigated the Soviet Union for its "ominous inclination...to use its military power – to intervene in local conflicts, with advisors, with equipment, and with full logistical support and encouragement for mercenaries from other Communist countries, as we can observe today in Africa."¹⁰⁸ Significantly, however, Carter did not link Soviet behavior in Africa to strategic arms control. Instead, he stressed that "our continuing major effort in the SALT talks taking place every day in Geneva are one means toward a goal of strategic nuclear stability."¹⁰⁹ In addition, he applauded reaching "balanced, verifiable agreements with our adversaries" because they could "limit the cost of security and reduce the risk of war," and pledged himself to maintaining appropriate military force levels.¹¹⁰ Thus, Carter once again separated

¹⁰⁷ Jimmy Carter, "Address at Wake Forest University, March 17, 1978," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=30516>.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

strategic arms considerations from Soviet behavior in Africa. The policy pendulum appeared to have swung back in Vance's favor.

Carter's decision to send Vance to Moscow in April 1978 to press ahead with negotiating the SALT agreement also seemed to validate Vance's strategic approach and enhance Vance's stature. In fact, a *Time Magazine* article in late April described Vance as a "man on the move" who was determined to "reassert the value of détente and edge the long-stalled SALT conference a bit closer toward agreement," and who successfully addressed the Soviet involvement in Africa with Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko.¹¹¹ *Time* glowingly described Vance as "selflessly professional," "self effacing," a man who "doesn't indulge in backbiting," but just the same has "steel" in his back, and a man who "forcefully advocates his department's well-researched positions at the forums in which policy is decided."¹¹² Nevertheless, *Time* also highlighted comments about Vance by former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger who praised Vance's conduct of foreign policy and "his fairness, his sound judgment, and his patience," but also suggested that Vance was not asserting himself sufficiently. Kissinger observed that: "There can be free debate within the government, but there

¹¹¹"Vance: Man on the Move. A Cool Diplomat Confronts Crisis in Africa, Deadlock in Russia, April 24, 1978," *Time.com*, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/printout/0,8816,916105,00.html>.

¹¹² Ibid.

has to be one recognizable voice that speaks for American foreign policy.”¹¹³ However, Kissinger’s suggestion that Vance was somehow to blame for the multiplicity of voices in the administration was misplaced. As *Time* pointed out, “That voice was supposed to be the voice of Jimmy Carter. But Carter, inexperienced and impetuous in foreign affairs, subject to conflicting advice..., has often vacillated and improvised. The consequence has been a series of foreign policy reverses.”¹¹⁴ Indeed, Carter’s changeable remarks about linkage appeared to constitute one such important vacillation. The *Time* article was but one example of many media stories that focused on the disparate voices in the administration, and Vance’s possible reemergence as Carter’s prime foreign policy aide.

Brzezinski, however, did not return to a less visible role. Through backgrounders provided to the media, Brzezinski again stoked the tensions between the National Security Council and the State Department, and perpetuated the confusion about linkage. In mid April, just as Vance seemed to be regaining his footing and preparing for a trip to Moscow, *The New York Times* reported on growing tension between the State Department and Brzezinski.¹¹⁵ Brzezinski not only publicly aired

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Richard Burt, "Tension Grows Between Brzezinski and the State Department," *The New York Times*, April 17, 1978, sec. A, p. 3.

NSC-State Department disputes, but dismissed Vance's ability to accomplish much of value in his Moscow talks. Brzezinski even "questioned whether Mr. Vance and his advisors would take a firm enough line in discussions with the Kremlin," and accused State Department officials of undercutting "policies worked out by Mr. Brzezinski and approved by President Carter."¹¹⁶ In response, a "high State Department official called the White House concerns 'absurd'."¹¹⁷

Two questions emerge from this review of the Vance-Brzezinski policy battle: why did President Carter tolerate Brzezinski undercutting Secretary Vance in this fashion; and why did Vance tolerate Carter's inconsistent support? It was mystifying that the President permitted Brzezinski to attack Vance and to imply that he was not adhering to U.S. policy. *Newsweek* later reported that Vance was "furious" about Brzezinski's and NSC Deputy David Aaron's efforts to convey that Vance and the State Department were "soft-lining" in their approach to the Soviet Union.¹¹⁸ Vance addressed such backbiting with Carter, and obtained Carter's assurances that it would

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Kim Willenson, "Tensions of State," *Newsweek*, April 24, 1978, 47.

cease.¹¹⁹ The backbiting and public debate over linkage, however, intensified rather than ended.

The Apex of the Conflict

The acrimonious debate over linkage and Soviet strategy, sustained by the pronouncements of Jimmy Carter, continued in various forms through the middle of June 1978. Vance fought for his position of no linkage and for his stature as Secretary of State. Brzezinski fought for his position of linking Soviet behavior to decisions about arms control and for greater influence with Carter. Carter's ultimate solution to the conflict was no solution: he embraced some of Vance's position; he embraced some of Brzezinski's position; and he was left with a position that was neither coherent nor understandable. Vance reacted by continuing to fight for his foreign policy principles.

On May 12, 1978, Vance appeared before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations to articulate the administration's Africa policy. It appeared that Vance was once again acting as the administration's primary foreign policy spokesman. Indeed, Vance's testimony reiterated the position that the administration affirmed in February 1978: "Our genuine interest in African problems" reflected "African problems in their own terms and not only in the context of East-West

¹¹⁹ Vance's aides and wife confirmed in interviews that Vance aggressively addressed Brzezinski's actions with Carter, but did so privately. See Saunders Interview, January 22, 2002 and Vance Interview, April 10, 2001.

relations.”¹²⁰ Vance also posed the question: “How can we avoid Africa’s becoming an East-West battleground and head off growing Soviet and Cuban military intervention?”¹²¹ Referencing the Horn of Africa problems as complex and difficult, Vance stressed that as long as Somali forces were infringing on Ethiopian territory, the United States would not improve relations with Somalia. Now that Somalia had stated that it would respect Ethiopian borders, the United States was engaged in discussions about providing a limited scope of aid, including defensive weapons. Vance also expressed a desire not to break off relations with Ethiopia and suggested that “continued dialogue with that government is in our interest and in the interest of peace and stability in the region.”¹²² Finally, Vance directly addressed the U.S. response to Soviet and Cuban activities in the Horn and elsewhere in Africa. He first alluded to the serious problems associated with the increasing interventions of the Soviets and Cubans:

It escalates the level of conflict. It jeopardizes the independence of African States. It creates concern among moderates that Soviet weapons and Cuban troops can be used to determine the outcome of any dispute on the continent. We are making a strenuous effort to counter Cuban and Soviet interventions in the disputes of African nations.... we have told the Soviets and the Cubans, publicly

¹²⁰ Cyrus Vance, "The Secretary: Issues Facing the United States in Africa, May 12, 1978," *Department of State Bulletin*, Volume 78, July 1978: 29.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 30.

and privately, that we view their willingness to exacerbate armed conflict in Africa as a matter of serious concern.¹²³

Significantly, Vance then directly addressed the linkage issue and articulated the policy that Carter and the SCC, minus Brzezinski, had explicitly embraced in February 1978:

...we have pointed out to the Soviets the dangers which their activities in Africa pose for our overall relations. I conveyed this view most recently when I was in Moscow. At the same time, we do not believe that it is in our national interest to make a negotiating linkage between reaching a good SALT agreement, which is clearly in our basic security interests, and the inevitable competition with the Soviets which will continue to take place in Africa and elsewhere in the Third World. A SALT agreement should not be a reward for good behavior. It should be signed if it maintains our national interest and that of our allies, and not otherwise.¹²⁴

Brzezinski, however, did not consider the issue settled and called for a review of the U.S. "objectives and interests in limiting Soviet/Cuban influence in Africa," to be completed no later than May 31, 1978.¹²⁵ This review, performed by a PRC under the chairmanship of the State Department, was charged by Brzezinski to ensure that "no course of action should be automatically excluded from consideration solely because it will present difficult political problems or would conflict with existing Administration

¹²³ Ibid., 31.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Policy Review Committee, "Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC-36, May 23, 31, 1978," *The Federation of American Scientists*, <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/prm/prm36.pdf>.

policies.”¹²⁶ The review did Brzezinski’s bidding, but did not produce conclusions consistent with Brzezinski’s thinking. The PRC explored the linkage issue, but differentiated between arms control negotiations that had “direct substantive linkages to Soviet activities in Africa, e.g., the Indian Ocean talks, and the Conventional Arms Transfer (CAT) restraint talks” and arms control negotiations that “do not have direct substantive linkage to Africa, e.g. SALT.”¹²⁷

The observations and conclusions of the PRC review bolstered Vance’s perspective: first, the United States should not link Soviet actions in Africa to SALT negotiations but should privately continue to make the Soviets aware that their activities were “raising tensions and adversely affecting public and Congressional attitudes”; second, the United States should continue its bilateral efforts with African governments to “strengthen our credibility and influence”; third, certain military-related measures combined with diplomatic and economic measures could “reduce the incentive of countries to seek Soviet assistance,” but this did not include U.S. troops; and finally, U.S. policy should recognize that the strength of African nationalism would likely “prevent the Soviets from achieving a dominant position” in Africa.¹²⁸ The central message of the review was that U.S. policies should avoid “direct and clear cut

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

opposition to Soviet/Cuban activity in Africa, using bilateral US-Soviet and US-Cuban relations as a means of increasing pressures” – that is, the United States should avoid those policies that placed African problems in a “sharply defined East-West context.”¹²⁹ Why? The review documented that such a focus on the East-West context would create a plethora of significant, negative consequences for the U.S. relationship with African states, and would also produce difficult congressional and public opinion issues. The review alluded to the necessity of one voice and one policy:

The President and the Secretary of State in major policy statements have set forth our view of Africa, defined our long-term purposes in positive terms, and outlined the type of relationship we desire and expect to have with the Soviets and the Cubans in the African context. The statements should be used as the basis for a well-orchestrated public diplomacy endeavor over the next year, and should be reiterated by Executive Branch officials using identical or closely similar language in order to avoid any confusion of public understanding here or abroad...¹³⁰

Brzezinski, however, did not permit this to happen. On May 28, Brzezinski, once again undermined not only Vance’s position as sole administration spokesman, but also the administration’s Soviet policy in his comments on the television program *Meet the Press*. During the program, Brzezinski offered a blistering attack on the Soviet Union, charged that Moscow had violated the code of détente through its activities in Africa, and called for an international response. Murrey Marder of the *Washington Post*

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

described his stunning appearance: “Never before has any senior strategist in the Carter administration thrown down the gauntlet to the Soviet Union so starkly, and at such a sensitive point.”¹³¹ What was particularly significant about this attack was that it occurred in the middle of Carter’s and Vance’s negotiations with Andrei Gromyko on SALT, negotiations that had produced some progress, but no breakthroughs. There was no mistaking Brzezinski’s message of linkage. In addition, not only did Brzezinski state that Soviet and Cuban activities in Africa were creating “strategic concerns,” but he also divulged that he was willing to play the China card. His comments that China and the United States had “parallel interests” constituted a direct warning to the Soviet Union that the United States would potentially improve ties to China as a counterweight to Soviet influence.¹³² This comment was yet another direct challenge to Vance, who adamantly opposed playing the China card. Meanwhile, Carter, whom the *New York Times* reported as articulating “ambiguous” statements about linking SALT to Soviet action in Africa, once again neither silenced Brzezinski nor clarified U.S. policy.¹³³

¹³¹ Murray Marder, "Brzezinski Delivers Attack on Soviets," *The Washington Post*, May 29, 1978, sec. A, p. 1.

¹³² Bernard Gwertzman, "Brzezinski Charges Moscow Violates ‘Code of Détente’,” *The New York Times*, May 29, 1978, sec.A, p. 4.

¹³³ Special to the Times, "Carter and Gromyko Report Some Gains on Strategic Arms," *The New York Times*, May 27, 1978, sec. A, p. 1.

With Brzezinski not willing to support the administration's policy, the public foreign policy debate continued unabated. News organizations in early June did a number of features about the Vance-Brzezinski conflict with varying conclusions about which foreign policy advisor was preeminent, but with the message that the conflict was hurting the administration's credibility. In response to some of the negative reporting, Carter publicly reasserted his support of SALT on June 2, and reaffirmed that U.S. policy was "to proceed aggressively with SALT discussions, to conclude a treaty as early as possible and without delay because of political considerations, and to make sure that the treaty, when concluded, is in the best interests of our country."¹³⁴ Martin Tolchin of *The New York Times* suggested that Carter "intended to dispel" the confusion concerning linkage, a concept ascribed to Brzezinski, and posited that "this morning, the President seemed to come down on the side of Mr. Vance."¹³⁵ Bernard Gwertzman of the *Times* also observed that Carter's comment about reaching an arms control agreement quickly appeared "to bolster the position of Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance in the tug of war for influence in Washington."¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Martin Tolchin, "Carter Says U.S. Is Still Seeking Early Accord on Arms with Soviets," *The New York Times*, June 3, 1978, sec. A, p. 1.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Bernard Gwertzman, "Carter's Call for Strong Effort on Arms Appears to Support the Softer Vance Line," *The New York Times*, June 3, 1978, sec. A, p. 6.

Gwertzman also raised questions about the long-term stability of Carter's position. Pointing out that in March Carter "gave his word to Mr. Vance and Paul C. Warnke, director of the Arms Control Disarmament Agency, that he would assign priority to achieving an agreement limiting strategic arms and that negotiations should not be linked to Soviet behavior elsewhere," Gwertzman noted that Carter had not consistently kept his word. Gwertzman appropriately located the ultimate responsibility for the private and public policy war over linkage with Carter:

...the spate of words, including Mr. Carter's somewhat ambiguous comments in Chicago last week, were raising doubts about that commitment. In effect, Mr. Carter's statement today appeared to remove ambiguities for the moment, but it underscored his apparent fluctuations in foreign policy and the difficulty, even for his advisors, to pin down his position...While his supporters assert...he is open to suggestion and can be persuaded to change his mind, his critics assert that his thinking on complicated foreign policy issues is unclear and subject to the views of those who spoke to him last.¹³⁷

A day later, Gwertzman reported that foreign leaders were concerned about the lack of administration cohesiveness on Soviet issues. British Prime Minister James Callaghan, described as the foreign leader closest to Carter, noted that "I'm not sure that I get a clear voice coming out of Washington on this. I hear several voices."¹³⁸ Gwertzman additionally pointed out that Vance's State Department aides were encouraging him to

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Bernard Gwertzman, "Mixed Signals. U.S. Remains of Two Minds (at least) on Africa," *The New York Times*, June 4, 1978, sec. E, p. 1.

speaking out more forcefully because he was being perceived as “having lost the confidence of the President even if he hasn’t.”¹³⁹

Recognizing the need for greater clarity about the U.S.-Soviet relationship, both at home and abroad, President Carter decided to give another major address on Soviet foreign policy -- a definitive policy address. The address he delivered at the Naval Academy’s commencement on June 7, 1978 sought to provide a comprehensive, cohesive statement of U.S. policy and strategies for engaging the Soviet Union. Instead, it exacerbated the impression that the Carter administration did not know its own mind.

Comfortable with Vance’s strategic perspective, Carter was also heavily influenced by the national security advisor whom he saw many times in the course of a day. Carter’s preparation for this speech reflected both his inexperience and arrogance. Carter believed that he could elicit the views of his advisors, select the best of the competing ideas, and meld them into sound policy. Although this approach would generate many valuable ideas, it did not produce sound, cohesive policies. As Vance recalled the preparation for the speech:

I sent him a draft of a speech that emphasized the complex nature of the U.S. Soviet relationship and the need for lowering political tensions on a reciprocal basis. Brzezinski also gave him a more confrontational draft. Carter drew from both, splitting the difference between the two poles of advice he was receiving. The end result was a stitched-together speech. Instead of combating the growing

¹³⁹ Ibid.

perception of an administration rent by internal divisions, the image of an inconsistent and uncertain government was underlined.¹⁴⁰

White House speech writer James Fallows agreed with Vance's characterization:

The speech was intended to set the record straight on U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union, which was then very muddled because of the varied comments coming from Brzezinski and Vance....Carter...asked Brzezinski, Vance, Andrew Young, Stansfield Turner, and several other advisors to submit memos suggesting the tone and content of the speech. Carter then assembled the speech essentially by stapling Vance's memo to Brzezinski's, without examining the tension between them. When he finished rewording the memos, the speech was done. It had an obvious break in the middle.¹⁴¹

Carter's speech indeed had two distinct sections and two distinct tones. In the "Vance section," Carter emphasized that the United States realized that even though its relationship with the Soviet Union was a competitive one, "Détente between our two countries is central to world peace."¹⁴² As Vance had often cautioned, Carter called for avoiding "excessive swings in the public mood in our country," and asked the American people to understand the "complex and sensitive nature" of détente. In particular, he emphasized the critical importance of a SALT agreement:

We want to increase our collaboration with the Soviet Union....Efforts still continue with negotiations toward a SALT II agreement....We must be willing to explore such a venue of cooperation despite the basic issues which divide us. The

¹⁴⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 102.

¹⁴¹ Fallows, "The Passionless President," 123.

¹⁴² Jimmy Carter, "Jimmy Carter's Naval Academy Address at the Commencement Exercises," *The American Presidency Project*, June 7, 1978, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=330915&st=&st1=>.

risks of nuclear war alone propel us in this direction. The numbers and destructive potential of nuclear weapons have been increasing at an alarming rate. That is why a SALT agreement which enhances the security of both nations is of fundamental importance.¹⁴³

Having noted that there were good prospects for a SALT II agreement, Carter then abruptly changed tone and lambasted the Soviet Union, with remarks similar to those employed by Brzezinski in his *Meet the Press* interview. He criticized the Soviet Union for its aggressiveness, for its use of military power and military assistance as its key way of expanding its influence, and for its use of proxy forces in Korea, Angola, and Ethiopia. Furthermore, he stressed that the “abuse of basic human rights in their own country, in violation of the agreement which was reached at Helsinki, has earned them the condemnation of people everywhere who love freedom.”¹⁴⁴ Alluding to the nations of Eastern Europe, Carter further emphasized that the United States was committed to “genuine self-determination and majority rule in those areas of the world where these goals have not yet been attained,” a statement that made it sound as if the United States was actively supporting the rollback of Soviet power in the Eastern bloc.¹⁴⁵ Even more significantly, Carter once again provided conflicting signals about linkage when he stated that the U.S. was not imposing linkage on the SALT process, but depending upon

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

whether the Soviet Union chose confrontation or cooperation, linkage could occur. Noting that the United States did not want to link the SALT negotiation to its competitive relationship with the Soviet Union, he raised the possibility that public opinion in the United States and elsewhere would demand it. And so, Carter challenged the Soviet Union:

The Soviet Union can choose either confrontation or cooperation. The United States is adequately prepared to meet either choice. We would prefer cooperation through a détente that increasingly involves similar restraint for both sides; similar readiness to resolve disputes by negotiations and not by violence, similar willingness to compete peacefully, and not militarily.¹⁴⁶

Carter concluded his comments about desired Soviet actions with an absolutistic statement: “Anything less than that is likely to undermine détente.”¹⁴⁷

The Annapolis speech was a major foreign policy disaster -- and a disaster of Carter’s own making. All commentators noted that the speech was intrinsically inconsistent, and many mocked particular aspects of it. When Vance called Dobrynin to get his reaction, Dobrynin “bluntly told him that in my personal opinion the speech could be described as anything but balanced.”¹⁴⁸ The *Washington Post*’s Murray Marder, for example, observed that “President Carter, in effect, made two speeches at Annapolis yesterday. They were about as dissimilar as the conflicting concepts of

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 411.

American-Soviet relations that embrace the opposing labels of Cold War vs. Détente.”¹⁴⁹ Marder pointed out that “specialists on geopolitics, inside and outside the Carter administration” were incredulous that in one paragraph Carter spoke of his desire to collaborate with the Soviet Union and in the next breath seemed to be calling for the liberation of the peoples of Eastern Europe. Marder also suggested that it would be an error to state that Carter truly split the difference between Vance and Brzezinski, because Carter again appeared to endorse Brzezinski’s “version of unacknowledged linkage.”¹⁵⁰ The *Economist* likewise declared that American-Soviet relations would be more, not less confused as a result of the speech.¹⁵¹ Senior members of the House of Representatives International Relations Committee wrote to Carter to request further policy clarification and noted that they were “embarrassed by their current inability to answer questions from their constituents as to what is U.S. policy on such issues as Soviet-American relations and Africa.”¹⁵² Tass, the Soviet Union’s press agency, deemed Carter’s speech “strange, to say the least,” suggested that the policy choice had

¹⁴⁹ Murray Marder, "Two Different Speeches," *The Washington Post*, June 8, 1978, sec. A, p. 1.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ "American-Soviet Relations: Less Confused?" *The Economist*, June 10, 1978, p. 50.

¹⁵² "House Panel Is Concerned Over Carter Soviet Policy," *The New York Times*, June 12, 1978, sec. A, p. 14.

not yet been made in the leadership circles of Washington, and castigated Brzezinski as the chief villain in the foreign policy process.¹⁵³ Finally, *Time Magazine's* conclusion from the speech was that "National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski's firm views on how the U.S. should deal with the Soviet Union are gaining ascendancy in the White House."¹⁵⁴

Vance Soldiers On

The fact that Vance did not resign as a matter of principle related to linkage policy in mid June 1978 after fighting and apparently losing not only the battle on linkage but also his role as Carter's chief foreign policy advisor and spokesman can be attributed to several things. It was apparent that Carter's policy was still in flux. Carter appeared to support the Vance position on linkage during one week and reverse himself the next week. Vance, however, was so committed to a SALT agreement as being in the country's preeminent interests that he was highly motivated to continue to fight for influence with Carter and to carry on the SALT negotiations. Furthermore, within a week of the Annapolis speech, it appeared that Vance and the policies he articulated were once again in the ascendancy. On June 19, 1978, Vance appeared before the

¹⁵³ Craig R. Whitney, "Soviet Calls Attitude of Carter 'Strange'," *The New York Times*, June 12, 1978, sec. A, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ "Rapping for Carter's Ear," *Time Magazine*, June 12, 1978, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/printout/0,8816,948155,00.html>.

House International Relation Committee, and announced that “I speak for the president as well as for myself,” stated that he had been tasked with clarifying Soviet policy, reiterated his belief that a positive course of action in Africa which removed it from East-West confrontations was in everyone’s interests, and confirmed that there was no linkage between the SALT negotiations and the Soviet involvement in Africa.¹⁵⁵ As Bernard Gwertzman suggested, “Mr. Vance seemed more forceful than usual in asserting that he spoke with the full authority of Mr. Carter and that the Administration was determined to avoid East-West confrontation in Africa and to press for agreements with Moscow in the negotiations on a treaty to limit strategic arms and on a comprehensive nuclear test ban.”¹⁵⁶ Moreover, at a gathering of members of Congress, President Carter reaffirmed what he had stated at the beginning of his administration: “He was the chief spokesman on foreign affairs for his Administration and that Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance was the principal spokesman for him.”¹⁵⁷ In addition, as this crisis subsided and Vance had apparently reclaimed his primacy, he was already deeply involved in the preparations for the Camp David summit, which

¹⁵⁵ Don Oberdorfer, "Vance Presents a Positive U.S. Foreign Policy," *The Washington Post*, Lexis-Nexis Academic University, June 20, 1978, http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/docu...zV&_md5=1a8a49e660f0502fa47bd7cb40d8b85d.

¹⁵⁶ Bernard Gwertzman, "Vance Urges Effort by U.S. and Russians to Reduce Tensions," *The New York Times*, June 20, 1978, sec. A, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ Bernard Gwertzman, "President Stresses Vance's Role as His Foreign Policy Spokesman," *The New York Times*, June 22, 1978, sec. A, p. 1.

would occur in September 1978. Wherever Vance turned, he was doing important work, work he clearly did not want to give up or turn over to Brzezinski whom he believed “put excessive weight on the use of military power or bluff, ignoring in my judgment, the political, the economic, and trade aspects of our relationship with the Soviet Union.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Bernard Gwertzman, "Vance, Looking Back, Lauds Pact on Arms and Retorts to Brzezinski," *The New York Times*, December 3, 1980, sec. A, p. 1.

CHAPTER 6. THE CHINA CARD

On the evening of December 15, 1978, President Jimmy Carter read a momentous communiqué that was being released simultaneously in Peking by the leaders of the People's Republic of China (PRC). It stated:

The United States and the People's Republic of China have agreed to recognize each other and to establish diplomatic relations as of January 1, 1979. The United States of America recognizes the Government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal Government of China. Within this context, the people of the United States will maintain cultural, commercial, and other unofficial relations with the people of Taiwan.¹

Carter's proud announcement of the normalization of relations with China -- a policy advocated and promoted by both National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance -- was indeed a significant foreign policy accomplishment. The process and people Carter used to negotiate that announcement, however, signified that Vance was not the primary foreign policy spokesman of the administration, at least on this key issue. Particularly during the second year of the Carter administration, while Vance was engaging Middle Eastern leaders in a peace process, establishing the U.S. relationship with European leaders, getting the SALT

¹ Jimmy Carter, "Diplomatic Relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China. Address to the Nation, December 15, 1978," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=30308>.

negotiations back on track, and battling against policies of linkage, Carter allowed Brzezinski, against Vance's forceful advice, to craft the U.S. policy toward China, and to imbue it with the understanding that improved U.S. relations with China would coerce the Soviet Union into policies of greater restraint. Not only did Carter permit Brzezinski to take the lead, but he allowed Brzezinski to be a key spokesman for U.S.-China policy, to articulate views about Soviet "hegemony" that undermined Vance's efforts to reach a SALT agreement quickly, and to develop a policymaking process that deliberately cut out State Department input. Carter's actions violated substantive and bureaucratic understandings that he and Vance had agreed to at the inception of the administration. The concrete sign of these violations was Carter's decision to announce the normalization agreement in December 1978 – a decision that Warren Christopher, Vance's deputy, called "a seemingly simple decision fraught with significant diplomatic meaning."²

The Historical Context

During the post World War II era prior to the Carter administration, the fundamental underpinnings of Chinese diplomacy were that China opposed superpower "hegemony," that it would oppose imperialism, and that it would maintain "the

² Warren Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime. A Memoir* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 89.

complete independence of the Chinese nation” in international affairs.³ Over time, however, China showed a willingness to diminish some of its attacks on the United States, and redirected its criticism towards the Soviet Union. Although one of the first diplomatic acts of Mao Zedong, leader of the new People’s Republic of China (PRC), was to sign a treaty with Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in February 1950 aimed at stopping future Japanese aggression, settling issues regarding borders and Soviet troop withdrawals, and confronting “enemies of the new China, especially the United States,” the Sino-Soviet relationship was fragile from the beginning.⁴ As Chen Jian has pointed out, not only were Chinese Communist Party-Soviet relations “inharmonious” during the 1946-1949 civil war, but Mao felt betrayed by the Soviet Union’s refusal to support Chinese ground forces during the Korean War with air units.⁵

The signing of the 1950 alliance may have been the high point in the Sino-Soviet relationship. Although China had received large low-interest loans from the Soviet Union, benefitted from Soviet technical support, collaborated with the Soviet Union in the 1954 Geneva conference, and utilized Soviet advisors, Mao became disenchanted with the “wholesale copying of Soviet models” and the Soviet approach to

³ Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 72.

⁴ Ibid., 78.

⁵ Ibid., 67, 204.

socialism.⁶ In addition, border disputes with the Soviet Union began to flare in 1959. When Mao's "Great Leap Forward" plan "ended in dismal failure" in 1959, Mao maintained that the Soviet Union had supported opponents of the plan and was responsible for its difficulties. In fact, the Soviet Union had restricted scientific and technological support to China. By the summer of 1960, after the split was visible in a nasty, open confrontation between Chinese and Soviet delegates at a Party Congress in Romania, the Soviets withdrew most of their advisors from China.⁷

In the 1960s, China sporadically signaled that it wanted to be more actively engaged in world politics. It also began to suggest that it viewed the Soviet Union as the more aggressive, imperialistic, power-hungry superpower. In the summer of 1963, the Sino-Soviet alliance officially collapsed during talks in Moscow in which Deng Xiaoping accused the Soviet Union of attempting to crush China. From 1960 to 1966, China actively promoted its brand of communism in the Third World by proselytizing in Third World countries. Chinese officials visited 20 countries in 1963 alone.⁸ Nevertheless, with the implementation of the Cultural Revolution in 1967, "China

⁶ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 161.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 162-165.

increasingly turned inward and upon itself,” and “by 1967, Chinese foreign policy had by all practical measures ceased to exist.”⁹

Toward the end of the 1960s, China continued to direct relatively more criticism at the Soviet Union than at the United States. After the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in August 1968, Chinese leaders were concerned that “Soviet leaders would seek to apply the Brezhnev Doctrine – the right to intervene in another socialist state to preserve socialism” to China. In response, “the Chinese launched a new campaign of polemics against ‘social imperialism’ as they now described Soviet expansionism.”¹⁰ Furthermore, China engaged the Soviet Union in hundreds of border incidents, including ones that involved serious Russian casualties from March to August, 1969. Chinese leaders even referred to the Soviet leaders as “new tsars,” to convey that they were imperialistic and not “merely ideologically errant and domineering.”¹¹

After Lin Biao, Mao’s designated successor lambasted the Soviet Union at the Ninth Congress of the Communist Party of China in April 1969, the Soviet Union deliberately engaged “in a war of nerves” with the Chinese, and raised the possibility of a nuclear attack on China. However, “the precipitous plunge in Sino-Soviet relations

⁹ Ibid., 163.

¹⁰ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 228, 229.

¹¹ Ibid., 231

that began after [the invasion of] Czechoslovakia was arrested by October 1969,” as Soviet Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin met with Zhou Enlai, and agreed to begin negotiating the border conflict issues.¹²

Beginning in November 1969, China resumed direct contact with American diplomats throughout the world. Diplomatic contacts between the Chinese and Americans fluctuated through 1971 as China protested American military actions in Indochina. Nevertheless, in July 1971 and again in October 1971, Henry Kissinger held meetings with Zhou Enlai in China. In spite of U.S. assurances to the Soviet Union that it was not trying to exploit Sino-Soviet tensions, Kissinger shared Soviet intelligence information with the Chinese, a first playing of the China card.¹³ Then, prior to going to Moscow, President Richard M. Nixon made a strategic statement by visiting China first in February 1972. The Shanghai communiqué that was issued as Nixon’s visit concluded noted each country’s opposition to “hegemony,” or “the new code word for Soviet expansionism and domination.”¹⁴ In addition, the joint communiqué stated that there was one China, which meant that the United States would end diplomatic relations with Taiwan once full relations were established with China. Furthermore, the United

¹² Ibid., 237-241.

¹³ Ibid., 250, 252-254, 257, 262.

¹⁴ Ibid., 266-267.

States committed itself to the “ultimate objective of the withdrawal of all U.S. forces and military installations from Taiwan.”¹⁵

After Nixon’s visit, Chinese-American relations were in a holding pattern. Liaison offices were established in Washington and Peking, but the Taiwan lobby in the United States and the 1976 presidential campaign contributed to a political stalemate on the normalization of relations issue in the United States.¹⁶ In addition, following the death of Mao in 1976, Chinese leaders jockeyed for leadership, and this “internecine strife” prevented the Chinese from engaging in new initiatives. Mao was succeeded as Party Chair and Premier by Hua Guofeng, but Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping assumed effective power during the Carter administration.¹⁷

As Carter assumed office, his administration needed and wanted to assess how to complete the process of normalizing relations, how to negotiate the terms of normalization, and at the same time how to retain cultural, commercial, and unofficial relations with the people on Taiwan. To establish its strategic policy with China, the administration also had to define: what was the core purpose of the relationship with China? Vance and Brzezinski ultimately developed different responses to this question, and, in a policy reversal, Carter ultimately chose Brzezinski’s answer.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 191-192.

¹⁷ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 289.

Initial Positions on the Strategic Meaning of China

As the Carter administration began, Carter, Brzezinski, and Vance appeared to be on the same policy page about a strategic relationship with China: all wanted to normalize relations with Peking. Even before Carter took office, he expressed his commitment to achieving full diplomatic relations between the United States and China. During the second presidential debate with President Gerald Ford in October 1976, he indicated support for normalization, and criticized the Ford administration for not moving quickly enough to achieve it: “We opened a great opportunity in 1972, which has pretty well been frittered - frit- frittered away under Mr. Ford, that ought to be a constant uh - inclination toward - uh - toward friendship.”¹⁸ While criticizing Ford, Carter also assured the electorate that: “I would never let that friendship with the People's Republic of China stand in the way of the preservation of the independence and freedom of the people on Taiwan.”¹⁹

When Carter and Vance reviewed desirable U.S. foreign policies during the meeting in which Carter offered him the secretary-of-state position, Carter assured him that they shared the same strategic outlook about China. Vance emphasized: “On China, we were in complete agreement that normalization of relations should be one of

¹⁸ Jimmy Carter, “The Second Carter-Ford Presidential Debate,” October 6, 1976, *Commission on Presidential Debates*, <http://www.debates.org/pages/rams76b.html>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

our principal objectives.”²⁰ For Vance, normalization was not an issue of whether to pursue it, but rather, how to achieve it and when. After assessing China’s new political situation and leaders, he counseled Carter to “proceed promptly but carefully.”²¹ There was no doubt in Vance’s mind that Carter and he viewed the secretary of state as the appropriate person to design and nurture the normalization process.²²

Brzezinski, on the other hand, initially identified “three independent aspects” in the potential U.S-China strategic relationship: the benefits of expanding the “reciprocal stakes” of both powers in a relationship; the benefits of “discouraging Soviet expansionism” by enhancing the “common strategic interest”; and finally, all the benefits attendant in the normalization process “which should be moved forward whenever opportune.”²³ Although Brzezinski detailed these three aspects of the potential relationship, he focused his attention on the second one which he described in his journal as: “Perhaps if the Soviets worry a little more about our policy toward China, we will have less cause to worry about our relations with the Soviets.”²⁴ In fact, Brzezinski admitted that initially he was “somewhat ambivalent” about moving forward

²⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 32.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 448.

²³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 199.

²⁴ Ibid., 200.

with normalization, and believed it was more important to “stress the strategic aspects of the relationship, especially as they bore on the Soviet Union.”²⁵ Indeed, if Brzezinski could have achieved the strategic aspects of the relationship alone, he might not have bothered with expediting normalization. Aspects of Brzezinski’s approach to China relations echoed Henry Kissinger’s “policy of departing from evenhandedness in developing relations with the two major communist parties.”²⁶ Just as Kissinger had observed that his visits to China “stirred the Soviets into moving more rapidly toward some agreements leading to the May 1972 summit,” so too Brzezinski believed it was important to constrain the Soviet Union by enhancing the strategic relationship with China.²⁷

As Gaddis Smith has pointed out, from the very beginning of the administration, fundamental differences existed between the views of Vance and Brzezinski regarding foreign policies toward the Soviet Union and China. Vance “wanted the United States to maintain a perfect balance between the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic, granting nothing to one not granted to the other, and being especially careful not to give Moscow the impression that it was threatened by new cordiality between Washington

²⁵ Ibid., 197-198.

²⁶ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 262.

²⁷ Ibid., 263.

and Peking.”²⁸ Brzezinski, in contrast, “believed that the whole point of the relationship with the People’s Republic was to make the Soviet Union feel threatened, and, therefore, inclined to be more accommodating to the United States.”²⁹

Early in 1977, the administration began its assessment about how to proceed toward normalization, and attempted to signal to China that normalization was a priority. Even before the Carter inauguration, Vance, by beginning a study of the “case for normalization and of the political, legal, and strategic issues,” demonstrated that he expected to be in charge of the policy assessments regarding normalization.³⁰ As the review progressed, he sent Carter a memorandum that outlined his view of the strategic relationship, with the expectation that Carter fully embraced this view. Vance cautioned that the U.S. needed to persuade the Chinese that the Carter administration had “a mature and realistic view of the world situation and the strategic balance.”³¹ He advocated conveying to the Chinese that the U.S. was determined to preserve its strength and to “stand up to the Soviets.”³² Moreover, Vance emphasized that:

²⁸ Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 92.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 76.

³¹ Ibid., 76.

³² Ibid.

*The Chinese must also be made to understand that we do not perceive our relations with them as one-dimensional (i.e., vis-à-vis the USSR) (emphasis added), but that we also look at our relationship in the context of key bilateral and international issues.*³³

Thus, Vance was attempting to ensure that U.S. China policy would stand on its own merits, without any reference to the Soviet Union, and to develop a way of expressing that to the Chinese.

At the same time, Carter, through Brzezinski, directed that a formal interagency review of China policy begin. On April 5, 1977, Carter tasked a Policy Review Committee (PRC) under the chairmanship of the Department of State to undertake a broad policy review of the U.S.-China relationship, and to complete the review by June. Significantly, Brzezinski used his authority as the writer/transmitter of this policy review memorandum to call for analysis consistent with his belief that the China strategic relationship might be used as a counterweight to Soviet power. The memo stated that “the PRC [meaning the Policy Review Committee] should undertake a broad review of our policies toward the sale of defense-related technology and equipment” to the People’s Republic of China, even though China had not requested arms purchases.³⁴ The memo also called for explicit assessments of “the likely Soviet perceptions and

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC 24, April 5, 1977," *Jimmy Carter Library*, <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/pddirectives>.

implications for U.S.-Soviet relations of alternative modes and degrees of U.S. strategic export controls vis-à-vis the PRC [People's Republic of China],” and “the controls to be exercised against the PRC compared to those against the USSR.”³⁵ Brzezinski clearly wanted the Policy Review Committee to assess the benefits of not just a normalized, but also a strategic relationship with the Chinese.

While these reviews were in progress, Carter declared in his May 2, 1977 address at Notre Dame that normalization was a priority:

It's important that we make progress toward normalizing relations with the People's Republic of China. We see the American and Chinese relationship as a central element of our global policy and China as a key force for global peace. We wish to cooperate closely with the creative Chinese people on the problems that confront all mankind. And we hope to find a formula which can bridge some of the difficulties that still separate us.³⁶

Showing that he influenced Carter's thinking on China early in the administration, Brzezinski later stressed that Carter had included this specific reference to China in this speech at Brzezinski's suggestion. Indeed, from the first days of the administration, Brzezinski was committed to ensuring that the U.S.-China relationship would be seen as “a central element of our global policy.”³⁷ Vance did not, however, disagree with this

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Jimmy Carter, "Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame," May 22, 1977.

³⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 199.

focus on normalization, only with Brzezinski's rationale for normalization. As Vance underlined:

As to the People's Republic of China, I had concluded that we should move promptly toward full diplomatic relations. As long as we maintained a realistic appreciation of the limits of Sino American cooperation, especially in security matters, and carefully managed the complex interrelationships between China, the Soviet Union, and ourselves, better U.S. relations with China would contribute to strengthening the balance of power both in Asia and globally.³⁸

The Policy Review Committee completed its China policy review in June 1977. During the review meetings and the deliberations about the drafts of PRM-24 prepared by Vance aide Richard Holbrooke, Vance detected that he, the Defense Department, and Brzezinski had different views about how to position U.S.-Chinese relations, that is whether to normalize relations because it could enhance the United States' relative power in the U.S.-Soviet strategic competition. Vance observed that Brzezinski and the Defense Department not only appeared to be willing to use the China relationship to disconcert the Soviet Union, but were also willing to "forge a de facto security relationship with the PRC before, or instead of, diplomatic relations."³⁹ In response, Vance cautioned Carter that this "approach could be quite dangerous and going very far down the road would pose real risks."⁴⁰ Acknowledging that the Chinese might be

³⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 46.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

receptive to a security relationship, Vance pointed out that the United States needed to be sensitive to the Soviet and Japanese reaction:

Nothing would be regarded as more hostile to the Soviet Union than the development of a U.S. Chinese security relationship...right now the U.S. has a closer relationship with each Communist superpower than either has with the other. We must continue to maintain that fragile equilibrium, recognizing how dangerous it is....Normalization is the best way to move our relations with Peking forward.⁴¹

Vance was particularly alarmed by the Policy Review Committee's deliberations about normalization on June 27, 1977: "On this occasion the first of what was eventually to become a major difference of opinion between Brzezinski and to a lesser degree Brown, and me over the question of security relations with Peking surfaced."⁴² The issues that Vance had raised with Carter in the above memo clearly persisted. Brown and Brzezinski supported "security enhancements," such as "exchange of military attaches, Chinese access to U.S. and Western 'dual-use' (civilian or military) technology and equipment, the acquiescence by the United States in third-country sales of military equipment to China, and other forms of security cooperation"⁴³ – even before normalization was consummated. Vance noted that while he agreed with some of the actions Brown and Brzezinski proposed, he strongly disagreed with their

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 78.

⁴³ Ibid.

perspective. He charged that Brown and Brzezinski were considering China to be a major strategic power, which it was not. He emphasized that whatever assistance the United States would supply would not make a significant difference in Chinese military capability. Moreover, Vance asserted: “Because of the Soviets’ excessive fear of China, however, any U.S. security cooperation with Peking would have serious repercussions on U.S.–Soviet relations. To me, the suggestion of a U.S.-PRC security relationship was an unwise notion that posed substantial risks for our relations with Moscow...”⁴⁴

Carter generally concurred with Vance’s perspective throughout 1977. In July, Carter decided to proceed on normalization and to send Vance to China in August with a proposal. Concerned that the political controversy associated with normalization might hurt the administration’s ongoing negotiations with the Soviets, Vance obtained Carter’s agreement to allow him to present what he called “a maximum position” to the Chinese regarding Taiwan that would allow U.S. government personnel to remain informally on Taiwan after normalization. Vance believed that if the Chinese did not accept the proposal, which was likely, they would still make slow, steady progress on normalization.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 79.

Vance was correct: the Chinese rejected the U.S. proposal. In private, the Chinese agreed to keep discussing normalization issues in the future. In public, Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping issued a critical statement about U.S. official comments about the outcome of the discussions, and further suggested that “efforts to normalize relations had suffered a setback during Vance’s visit.”⁴⁶ The root cause of Deng’s derogatory public comments was a leaked newspaper story from Brzezinski’s office that stated that “the White House was pleased with Vance’s talks in Beijing and that the Chinese had shown new ‘flexibility’ on normalization.”⁴⁷ The statement about the Chinese expressing flexibility was not true, and was viewed by the Chinese as propaganda. Patrick Tyler recounted the reactions of State Department officials who were on the plane on the way home from China: “Vance erupted with anger. Someone was trying to sabotage the whole trip by provoking the Chinese. It was a pernicious leak, and everyone on the Vance plane saw Brzezinski’s hand.”⁴⁸ As furious as Vance was with Brzezinski and NSC staffers, he “was determined to avoid a pointless public

⁴⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 202.

⁴⁷ Patrick Tyler, "The (ab)normalization of U.S.-Chinese Relations," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 1999, <http://www.foreignaffairs.org>, p. 6.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

debate. I recommended to Carter that we should stick to our course, and that we should not imply that we would move any faster on normalization than we actually could.”⁴⁹

Thus, the administration’s early work on China issues during 1977 -- efforts Brzezinski described as “ambivalent”⁵⁰ -- revealed a familiar pattern: Carter and Vance shared a similar approach to China policy; Brzezinski forcefully attacked the approach; Vance forcefully countered the Brzezinski attack; and Carter, for a brief time, supported Vance’s (and his) initial view of the rationale for normalization. The story of Vance’s early China negotiations also revealed another alarming, but reoccurring action: Brzezinski and staff, through media backgrounders, undermined Vance’s work. Brzezinski even misleadingly asserted at the end of 1977, that “with Vance preoccupied with other foreign policy issues, Holbrooke and his State Department colleagues looked increasingly to the White House for leadership” on normalization issues.⁵¹ What had occurred was that Carter and Vance had decided temporarily to focus on Panamanian, Soviet, and Middle Eastern issues as a matter of priority.⁵² As Jean Garrison documented in a case study about Brzezinski’s manipulation of the foreign policy

⁴⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 83.

⁵⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 197

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁵² Vance, *Hard Choices*, 83, and Carter, *Keeping Faith*. 196. Carter in fact emphasized: “I did not want to make a public move on China until the Panama Canal issue was resolved.”

agenda on China policy, Carter's decision to proceed slowly on normalization in 1977 could be "explained, in part, because he found Vance's policy arguments and domestic concerns compelling. SALT was the president's central priority and domestically his foreign policy plate was quite full at the time."⁵³ To imply that Vance was dropping the ball on China because he was preoccupied with other issues was not accurate.

Nevertheless, with Vance and Carter deliberately focused on other issues at the end of 1977, Brzezinski was free to make control over China policy one of his top priorities. As he acknowledged, he was committed to a "genuinely cooperative relationship between Washington and Beijing" that "would greatly enhance the stability of the Far East and that, more generally...would be to U.S. advantage in the global competition with the Soviet Union."⁵⁴ Moreover, Brzezinski stressed:

...the Soviet dimension was one of those considerations of which it is sometimes said, 'Think of it all times but speak of it never.' I, for one, thought of it a great deal, even though I knew that publicly one had to make pious noises to the effect that U.S.-Chinese normalization had nothing to do with U.S.-Soviet rivalry.⁵⁵

Brzezinski suggested that since the Soviet Union was using the "Cuban proxy" in the Third World, that the U.S. should not "be excessively deferential to Soviet sensitivities

⁵³ Jean A. Garrison, "Explaining Change in the Carter Administration's China Policy: Foreign Policy Advisor Manipulation of the Policy Agenda," *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, Summer 2002, Volume 29, (2): 90.

⁵⁴ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 196.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

about U.S.-Chinese collaboration.”⁵⁶ Brzezinski argued that to follow Vance’s policy of not linking Soviet misconduct with decisions about SALT ignored the fact that the Soviet Union was negatively linking SALT to improved U.S.-China relations. Brzezinski contended that “U.S.-Chinese collaboration could be valuable in helping Moscow understand the value of restraint and reciprocity.”⁵⁷ Brzezinski decided, therefore, to give “normalization, and later the expansion of the U.S.-Chinese relationship, a great deal of personal attention,” and acknowledged that “policy toward China represented one of the key issues over which I had the most direct control.”⁵⁸

Brzezinski Takes Charge

In late 1977, Brzezinski maneuvered to take over China policy from the State Department and to gain responsibility for overseeing the negotiation of the normalization agreement. Patrick Tyler described how Brzezinski asked NSC aide Michel Oxenberg to contact a Chinese official to get Brzezinski an invitation to visit China:

Oksenberg wasted no time. He arranged a lunch with a Chinese diplomat and advertised Brzezinski’s interest. A few days later, Huang Zhen strolled into the Roosevelt Room of the White House, escorted by the vice president, who was

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

hosting a farewell luncheon for the retiring Chinese diplomat. There, in front of Vance and his aides, Huang loudly declared that Brzezinski was most welcome in Beijing. 'I am extending an invitation for you to come,' he said. Brzezinski graciously accepted the invitation as if it were a routine matter.⁵⁹

Brzezinski admitted that he had “quietly encouraged” this contact and the invitation.

He also remarked that Vance phoned him “in considerable agitation,” and that Vance aides Richard Holbrooke and Philip Habib had protested Brzezinski’s actions in an encounter with NSC staffer Oksenberg.⁶⁰ Brzezinski dismissed the State Department attitude as “turf-conscious,” and embarked on a serious campaign to “push more energetically” to take over China policy.⁶¹ In spite of Vance’s objections, he worked with Secretary of Defense Harold Brown in early 1978 to devise an expedited system for handling Chinese requests for scientific contacts and consideration of the transfer of military technology to China. He emphasized that: “*On my own authority* (emphasis added) I also arranged for the Chinese to obtain a NATO briefing on the global strategic problem, *thereby initiating a tacit security relationship with them* (emphasis added).”⁶²

⁵⁹ Tyler, "The (Ab)normalization of U.S.-Chinese Relations," 8.

⁶⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 203.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

Furthermore, he began to hold “increasingly candid and far ranging” consultative meetings with the head of the Chinese Liaison Mission.⁶³

In brief, Brzezinski started to act as if he were the secretary of state for China. Furthermore, during the policy meetings of Carter’s collegial system, Vance started to lose some key policy arguments, such as being neutral about proposed arms sales by U.S. allies to the PRC, and sensed that Brown and Brzezinski might be winning the argument about having “a stronger security component in the evolving relationship with Peking.”⁶⁴ Indeed, Brzezinski tenaciously advocated “playing the China card” in internal meetings. In an SCC meeting on March 2, 1978, Brzezinski advocated countering Soviet influence in the Horn by approaching the Chinese again about normalization, other political contacts, or technology transfers. In response, Vance emphasized that he supported talking to the Chinese about science and technology, but disagreed about establishing a political relationship as a counterweight to the Soviets. At this juncture, Harold Brown stated that he disagreed with Vance about not having political consultations with China – and with that, Brzezinski knew that he had high-level support within the administration for a strategic relationship with the Chinese. Brown even proposed getting together with the Chinese, and issuing “a joint statement of concern about the Horn and appending it to a statement that we will consult on other

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 114.

areas where we have a joint interest.” He added: “That would get the Soviet’s attention.”⁶⁵ Vance forcefully responded:

That would get their attention but we are at the point where we are on the brink of ending up with a real souring of relations between ourselves and the Soviet Union and it may take a helluva long while to change and may not be changed for years and I think that it is a very important step to take – we should examine it carefully before we go down that road.⁶⁶

The meeting concluded with no consensus about the nature of the potential U.S.-Chinese relationship.

Within two months, the internal Brzezinski-Vance split on China was covered by the media. *Time Magazine*, for example, noted that “Vance and Brzezinski are both committed to the eventual normalization of relations between the U.S. and China, but they disagree over how that card should be played.” The article described Vance as “sensitive to Soviet paranoia about Sino-American ‘encirclement’ and not eager to exacerbate the Kremlin’s fears at this time.” In contrast, it pointed out that “Brzezinski sees the Peking connection as an opportunity to keep the Russians off balance. Partly for this reason, he is hoping to visit Peking later this year.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Cyrus Vance, "Transcript of SCC Meeting on the Horn of Africa, March 2, 1978," *Declassified Documents Reference System*, http://www.ddrs.psmedia.com/tplweb=cgi/fastweb?getdoc+drs_im.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ "Top Officials Disagree on How to Deal with the Kremlin," *Time Magazine*, April 10, 1978, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,9916,948051,00>.

The substantive difference in their positions highlighted by *Time* was a key reason that Vance vigorously opposed Brzezinski making a trip to China. Moreover, Vance's attitude was that he, and not Brzezinski, was the administration's policy spokesman and negotiator. Vance stressed: "I felt very strongly that there could only be two spokesmen, the president and the secretary of state. I was also concerned that Zbig might get into the issue of normalization before we had finished formulating a detailed position and consulted Congress adequately. Timing was crucial, and the issue was filled with nuance and complexities that it would have been premature to address."⁶⁸

Vance expected Carter to support him on this crucial issue of authority. But Carter ascribed his secretary's resistance to Brzezinski going to China as a typical turf issue, as if Vance's concerns had no merit, as if Vance were being unreasonable: "Secretary Vance was insisting that any negotiations be carried out through him. I presumed that the State Department professionals were still smarting over Secretary William Rogers having been bypassed when Henry Kissinger, as Nixon's National Security Advisor, played such a major role in preparing for the President's visit to China and in negotiating the Shanghai communiqué."⁶⁹ For the next few months, Brzezinski "would use his invaluable briefing hour with the president at the beginning

⁶⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 114-115.

⁶⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 1998.

of each day to gently press his case,” even though Carter “even snapped at Brzezinski to stop pestering him about it.”⁷⁰ Brzezinski acknowledged that he developed an alliance with both Vice President Mondale and Defense Department Secretary Harold Brown to support his trip, and declared “that my reputation as the more ‘hard-nosed’ member of the foreign policy team would be helpful in generating greater understanding with the Chinese” – again maligning Vance as insufficiently tough.⁷¹ Brzezinski admitted to Carter that the State Department opposed his trip, but then told Carter “he ought to decide on his own whether this would be a useful thing for me to do or not.”⁷²

Carter initially told Brzezinski that he was reluctant to send him, because he was “sensitive to Vance’s concerns...I don’t want to be seen as jumping all over Cy, given the fact that he has such strong feelings on the subject. I will talk to him and then try to make a decision on that basis.”⁷³ And for a brief period, it appeared that Vance had convinced Carter to send Vice President Mondale to China as part of an already scheduled Far Eastern trip. Brzezinski, pointing out that a Mondale trip might “generate expectations that we were on the verge of normalizing relations,” and that he and not Mondale had been explicitly invited, vociferously argued with Carter about this

⁷⁰ Ibid., 8,9.

⁷¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 204.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 205.

tentative decision.⁷⁴ Ultimately, Carter ignored Vance's concerns, as well as the negative media reports about serious friction between Vance and Brzezinski,⁷⁵ and determined that he would indeed send Brzezinski to China. Carter's excuse was that he did not wish to delay SALT negotiations, although retaining Vance's control of the China issue would not have done that. So, Carter "decided to send Cy to Moscow, and at the same time told him that Brzezinski would go to Peking as soon as the Panama treaties were ratified. Cy did not like the arrangement, but he accepted my decision."⁷⁶ Carter also maintained that he was responding to political sensitivities about SALT. In fact, he suggested that combining two peaceful moves – a SALT treaty with the Soviets and normalized relations with China – would promote congressional support for his foreign policies.⁷⁷ Of course, the argument that Carter had to send Brzezinski to China did not logically follow from this, especially since Brzezinski and Vance – and even Carter – did not share the same strategic view of the importance of SALT. In fact, Brzezinski admitted that in a memorandum in which he pressed Carter to resolve the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 205

⁷⁵ *The Washington Post* reported that Vance had not only opposed the idea of the trip, but "worked to thwart it through the policy process because he had concerns that 'it could complicate delicate negotiations with the Soviet Union on strategic arms and other topics.'" In: Oberdorfer, Don, "Brzezinski Plans to Visit China, Despite Reported Opposition from Vance, *The Washington Post*, April 27, 1978, sec. A, p. 18.

⁷⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 198.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 199.

question of whether he wanted a SALT ratification first and then normalization, or vice versa. Brzezinski then revealed: “I tended to favor the latter, but the President was noncommittal.”⁷⁸

During the preparation time for Brzezinski’s trip, Brzezinski was supported by Harold Brown in his arguments that the United States should encourage the Chinese to move forward quickly to resolve normalization. Brzezinski pronounced Vance “reticent,” but observed that the “president became increasingly persuaded that I should address myself directly to the question of normalization.”⁷⁹ Carter then confided in Brzezinski that he “doesn’t want to play games behind Cy’s back, but he would prefer to tell me this directly. And if I find the opportunity to move, I should move.”⁸⁰ That meant that Carter was willing to have Brzezinski make a push toward normalization as long as it was apparent that China would meet the U.S.’s basic conditions about a continued relationship with Taiwan. Carter’s confidential conversation with Brzezinski also signaled to Brzezinski that at least on this issue, Brzezinski was Carter’s prime foreign policy advisor.

Carter sent Brzezinski to Peking in late May with a mandate to tell the Chinese that “the United States has made up its mind” on normalization, and was “prepared to

⁷⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 207.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 207.

move forward with active negotiations to remove the various obstacles to normalization.”⁸¹ “I was also instructed,” Brzezinski recalled, “that I might indicate informally to the Chinese that the United States is planning to further reduce its military presence in Taiwan this year, to widen the opportunities for the commercial flow of technology to China, to increase direct contacts on a regular and perhaps scheduled basis for our mutual advantage, and to invite Chinese trade and military delegations to visit the United States.”⁸²

Vance was pleased that Brzezinski “followed his instructions in the private talks with the Chinese in May,” but was deeply disturbed by the “provocative remarks” Brzezinski made “in public about Soviet international actions.”⁸³ To be sure, during the China visit which began on May 20, 1978, Brzezinski took the opportunity to highlight his stature and to articulate his world view – again, a world view that was substantively different from Vance’s perspective. Brzezinski emphasized that the United States and China shared “certain common fundamental interests” and “similar long-term strategic concerns,” and suggested that “the most important of these is our position on global and

⁸¹ Brzezinski's instructions based on a May memorandum that Vance drafted in concert with Brown and Brzezinski, reflected agreement on normalization terms by all of Carter's advisors. See Vance, *Hard Choices*, 115.

⁸² Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 208.

⁸³ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 116.

regional hegemony.”⁸⁴ Countering Vance’s strategic view about the relative importance of China, he contended: “We should cooperate again in the face of a common threat. For one of the central features of our era – a feature which causes us to draw together – is the emergence of the Soviet Union as a global power.”⁸⁵

From Brzezinski’s comments one could easily infer that Carter and his national security director together were in charge of foreign policy -- that they shared the China policy aimed toward the cooperation of China and the United States in opposing the Soviet Union, and the conviction that a relationship with China was of equal interest to the United States as was one with the Soviet Union. Brzezinski’s comments clearly contradicted Vance’s belief about the importance of balance, and even contradicted previous comments by President Carter about the importance of balance. Indeed, Brzezinski stressed that he hoped to “counter the image of the Carter Administration as being soft vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.”⁸⁶

Using undesired input from State Department staff who accompanied him on the trip, Brzezinski delivered a toast at an evening banquet that in part departed from the “opposition-to-hegemony” tone of his opening statement, and emphasized the desire for

⁸⁴ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 211.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

a U.S.-PRC friendship that was “vital and beneficial to world peace.”⁸⁷ But then Brzezinski added his own message to challenge the Soviet Union: “Only those aspiring to dominate others have reason to fear the development of American-Chinese relations.”⁸⁸ Although Brzezinski used some of the assistance provided by State Department staff in preparing this message, the trip exacerbated conflicts between department and NSC staff. At Vance's insistence, department staff had accompanied Brzezinski, but Brzezinski proceeded to shut them out of all meetings and would not even share talking points with them.⁸⁹ Richard C. Holbrooke, Vance's assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, complained that he “had been subjected ‘to the most humiliating treatment’.”⁹⁰ Holbrooke and Brzezinski's NSC aide Michel Oksenberg even had a physical fight on the airplane on the way home about Brzezinski's unwillingness to share critical information with the State Department and Vance.⁹¹

Carter pronounced Brzezinski's visit, which concluded with an agreement to complete normalization negotiations by mid-December 1978, as “very successful.”

⁸⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 217.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Tyler, “The (ab)normalization of U.S.-Chinese Relations,” 106.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 110.

Clarifying that Brzezinski's mission was not a negotiating meeting, Carter maintained that Brzezinski had established a groundwork for further progress, and provided a valuable list of actions that the Chinese might implement to enhance U.S. perceptions of the benefits of normalization. Carter was particularly delighted that the Chinese news reports carried the full text of his Annapolis speech, the speech on the Horn of Africa that was maligned for its belligerency, inconsistencies, and lack of coherence by administration observers in the United States and Europe, and responded positively to it.⁹² Brzezinski also was extraordinarily pleased by some of the positive coverage of the trip and by his perception that he would be in a position to continue the strategic repositioning of China vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. He also observed that his trip caused "a renewed clash with Vance," in part precipitated by his appearance on *Meet the Press* after he returned from China.⁹³ Brzezinski's belligerence toward the Soviet Union was palpable in this program, which dealt far more with Soviet issues than progress toward normalization with China.

As happy as Carter was about Brzezinski's accomplishments in China, he was furious about his *Meet the Press* performance. Brzezinski even admitted that the President told him that he that he "put all of this responsibility on the Soviets," that they "were conducting a worldwide vitriolic campaign, encircling and penetrating the

⁹² Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 200-201.

⁹³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 219-220.

Middle East, placing troops on the Chinese frontier.”⁹⁴ Carter told Brzezinski that he “just went a little too far.”⁹⁵ Shortly thereafter, Carter publicly recommitted himself to Vance as the primary spokesman for foreign policy, along with himself. Nevertheless, Carter allowed Brzezinski to retain effective control of China issues, of the building of an economic and exchange relationship with the Chinese, and of the negotiations process for normalization.

A Final Brzezinski Manipulation

In spite of his persistent disagreements with Vance, Brzezinski maintained that after his visit to China, he and Vance were able to work well together on China issues. In fact, Brzezinski and Vance appeared to agree on the normalization timeline. In an April 1978 meeting, Vance stated that there was a 50 percent chance that negotiations on the SALT agreement would be done by the end of July. He suggested that it would be desirable to have the normalization completed before the end of 1978 so that it would be out of the way before the SALT ratification debate began.⁹⁶ Brzezinski later noted that he was pleased that Vance repeated his belief that a mid-December date

⁹⁴ Ibid., 220-221.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 221.

⁹⁶ Cyrus Vance, "Summary Minutes of the April 11, 1978 Meeting on Korea and China," *Declassified Documents Reference System*, <http://0-galenet.galegroup.com.library.lausys.georgetown.edu/serv1>.

might be optimal for a normalization announcement in a June 12 memo to Carter, even if this resulted in both SALT and normalization being ready for congressional consideration in early 1979.⁹⁷ Later, when criticized for derailing the SALT negotiations, Brzezinski alluded to Vance's suggested timeline to disabuse his critics of the notion that he "deliberately contrived the normalization and the invitation to Deng to visit Washington so as to scuttle Vance's efforts to obtain a SALT agreement."⁹⁸ What Brzezinski did not say was that Vance had expected that the SALT II negotiations would be completed well before the end of 1978. With negotiations completed and finalization a mere formality, Vance would not care as much about congressional action on normalization preceding the Senate ratification proceedings for SALT.

In describing the period between Brzezinski's visit to China and the announcement of normalization in December 1978, Carter emphasized that the negotiating work was done purposely out of the White House.⁹⁹ Brzezinski noted that even though Vance and he were closely monitoring Leonard Woodcock's negotiations in Beijing, that Carter was not only closely informed, but "very much in charge."¹⁰⁰ This meant that in effect Brzezinski was in charge. Carter stressed, for example, that

⁹⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 223.

⁹⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 223.

⁹⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 200-204.

¹⁰⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 229.

since all communications with Leonard Woodcock at the Chinese Liaison office were done out of the White House to ensure secrecy, Vance had to leave the State Department to participate in the discussions and to provide direction to Woodcock. The implication was that the State Department could not be trusted to preserve secrecy. In fact, as Warren Christopher pointed out, Vance could only share China negotiations information with Richard Holbrooke and Christopher.¹⁰¹

Brzezinski exerted himself to meet the December normalization deadline and to expand connections to China on every level. He scheduled visits to China by Secretary of Energy James Schlesinger and Presidential Science Advisor Frank Press. Brzezinski additionally “intensified the frequency and scope of my personal consultations with the head of the Chinese Liaison Mission in Washington,” – an activity that would normally be in the purview of the State Department.¹⁰² Brzezinski criticized the State Department moves to initiate a diplomatic relationship with Vietnam, especially since he had labeled Vietnam as a “Soviet proxy,” and ultimately Carter decided to slow down Vietnam normalization.¹⁰³ Even though Carter insisted on maximum security during the negotiations process, he told Brzezinski to let the Chinese know that the U.S. had settled major SALT issues with the Soviet Union, and that Carter and Brezhnev

¹⁰¹ Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime. A Memoir*, 89.

¹⁰² Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 226.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 229.

would soon have a summit meeting -- instructions that indicated that Carter was willing to violate the normal confidence associated with Soviet talks in order to keep the Chinese both informed and on track to normalization.¹⁰⁴

On December 9, Vance began a trip to London and the Middle East, which was to conclude with meetings in Tel Aviv on December 14. Knowing that negotiations with China were close to being completed, he reached an understanding with Carter that if negotiations were completed, no announcement would be made until after January 1, 1979. As Warren Christopher emphasized, the timing of this was critical to Vance because he “was scheduled to meet with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko in Geneva on December 21 to complete details of a new arms limitation treaty and to set a date for a Carter-Brezhnev summit for early 1979.”¹⁰⁵ Vance thought it imperative to have Soviet agreement prior to the announcement of normalization. He feared that “the Soviets would immediately dig in their heels” if they were presented with a change in Chinese relations.¹⁰⁶

Carter did not honor his agreement with Vance. On December 13, when the normalization agreement was settled in a final meeting with Woodcock and Deng, and Deng had agreed to visit the United States, Brzezinski persuaded the president to

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 223.

¹⁰⁵ Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, 90.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

announce the agreement in a joint communiqué at 9 pm on December 15, the day of Vance's return from the Middle East.¹⁰⁷ In a phone call to Vance in Jerusalem, Carter announced his plans. Christopher stressed that Vance vehemently objected to the announcement's timing, but Carter overruled him.¹⁰⁸

How could Carter dismiss such a critical pledge that he had made to Vance and possibly impede progress on the arms limitation treaty? Warren Christopher described what happened as a Brzezinski coup, but again, a coup that Carter empowered. He maintained that during the final critical hours of orchestrating the normalization announcement, Brzezinski "had achieved his coup by seeing that Holbrooke and I were blacked out."¹⁰⁹ During these six hours, Vance had no knowledge that the announcement was under consideration. Christopher suspected that, even though Brzezinski had argued for extreme secrecy with the president to avoid leaks, his real purpose "was to demonstrate that U.S. relations with China took precedence over those with the Soviets."¹¹⁰

Christopher did work with NSC staffer Oksenberg, and Brzezinski to prepare the final normalization documents. But, as Brzezinski emphasized, on the day of the

¹⁰⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 202-203.

¹⁰⁸ Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, 90.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

announcement, the Chinese raised the significant issue of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. The Chinese assumed that they would be discontinued immediately; the U.S.'s position was that it would "continue after a one-year pause during which the treaty is being abrogated."¹¹¹ In Vance's absence, Brzezinski negotiated an agreement with the Chinese that stated that the U.S. would respond to questions by noting that it would continue to trade with Taiwan after the expiration of the defense treaty, including selective sales of defensive arms, but that such trade would not endanger regional peace, and by acknowledging that even though China endorsed normalization, it did not agree with the U.S position. This resolved the last-minute issue.¹¹²

With Vance out of town until almost the exact time of the announcement, Brzezinski reported the news to Dobrynin before the announcement, and gloated that Dobrynin "looked absolutely stunned. His face turned kind of gray and his jaw dropped."¹¹³ Brzezinski assured him that "it wasn't directed against anyone and that American relations with China would now have as normal a character as Soviet relations with China. Formally, a correct observation; but substantively, a touch of irony."¹¹⁴ Leffler maintained, however, that Brzezinski had misinterpreted Dobrynin's

¹¹¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 231.

¹¹² Ibid., 230.

¹¹³ Ibid., 232.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

reaction. In fact, both Dobrynin and Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko were furious.¹¹⁵ They believed that the announcement and the follow up commentary signified that the strategic focus of the United States had been at least modified. From the Soviet perspective, the Joint Communiqué, issued by both governments on January 1, 1979, contained obvious mixed messages. On the one hand, it stressed Vance's focus on the rationale for normalization: "We do not undertake this important step for transient tactical or expedient reasons. In recognizing the People's Republic of China, that it is the single Government of China, we are recognizing a simple reality."¹¹⁶ On the other hand, by employing the Chinese and Brzezinski use of the word "hegemony," the announcement appeared to formalize a joint U.S.-China opposition to "hegemony,"¹¹⁷ meaning Soviet expansionism: "Neither should seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region or in any other region of the world and *each is opposed to efforts by any other country or group of countries to establish such hegemony* (emphasis added)."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 295.

¹¹⁶ Jimmy Carter, "Diplomatic Relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China. Address to the Nation, December 15, 1978," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=30308>.

¹¹⁷ Vance later clarified that "hegemony" was a "Chinese code word describing Soviet global ambitious." By using this term, Brzezinski implied that the United States and the PRC were strategic allies. See Vance, *Hard Choices*, 111.

¹¹⁸ Jimmy Carter, "Diplomatic Relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China. Address to the Nation, December 15, 1978."

Thus, the announcement of normalization of relations between the United States and China was not just a “seemingly simple decision fraught with significant diplomatic meaning,” but it was a decision imbedded with strikingly different meanings and impacts. For Brzezinski, however, it represented a stunning policy and bureaucratic victory.

Impacts on Vance

President Carter later wrote that “China was one of our few foreign-policy tasks to prove much more pleasant and gratifying than I had expected at the outset of my term.”¹¹⁹ Vance graciously acknowledged that normalization was “one of the enduring achievements of the Carter years,” and that “we had accomplished normalization in a way that met all of our objectives.”¹²⁰ For Vance, however, the policymaking process that Carter employed on the road to normalization called into question Carter’s adherence to the strategic policies about the Soviet Union and arms control that Vance and he had embraced at the inception of the administration. Alarming from Vance’s perspective, the Joint Communiqué issued on January 1, 1979 incorporated Brzezinski’s willingness and ability to use the Chinese word “hegemony” in ways that damaged the U.S. relationship with the Soviet Union. Moreover, even though Carter had reiterated

¹¹⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 215.

¹²⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 119, 121.

in June 1978 that Vance was his chief policy advisor and spokesman, the normalization process demonstrated that this was not the case. Indeed, Carter's decision about the announcement's timing had undermined Vance's commitment to executing the SALT agreement as the lynchpin of U.S. strategic policy. In addition, by allowing Brzezinski to visit China and to manage the normalization process from the White House, Carter had once again violated his pledge to Vance about foreign policy primacy. Not only had he violated his pledge about foreign policy primacy, but Carter privately had been disturbingly dismissive of Vance with Brzezinski, an action that only served to encourage Brzezinski to become more assertive.

Continuing to press on as secretary of state was, therefore, not easy. Brzezinski, after his successful China transaction, felt emboldened, and continued to assault Vance's authority. In a memo to Carter that provided a midterm assessment of foreign policy and achievements, Brzezinski stated that:

Normalization with China obviously carries with it the risk of Soviet over-reaction and miscalculations in both Peking and Moscow. There is also a ripple effect. The Germans, for example, are already nervous that the Soviet response to our playing "the China card" will result in the Russians playing "the German card."¹²¹

Brzezinski's response to this was that Carter, meaning the White House and not the Department of State, needed to control strictly the Soviet relationship. He suggested to

¹²¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "NSC Weekly Report #86, January 26, 1979," *Declassified Documents Reference System*, (Galenet), <http://0-galenet/galegroup.com/library.laus.georgetown.edu/servi/>, [http.](http://)

Carter that he “should insist on tight personal control of all actions affecting our relationship with the Soviet Union” because this approach had produced such excellent results in regard to China and the Middle East.¹²² Brzezinski, who was the most egregious leaker of information to the media and most persistent self-promoter in the administration, then audaciously recommended to Carter that the only way to dispel the “notion that we are amateurish and disorganized and that our policies are uncertain and irresolute” was to conduct a “significant shake-up, particularly in the State Department.”¹²³ Although Brzezinski acknowledged that “there are faults here in the White House, in the NSC, and certainly in Defense,” he had determined from conversations with journalists that “the leaks and misinformation coming out of the State Department are of unprecedented proportions.”¹²⁴

Just as Brzezinski privately attacked Vance with Carter, Brzezinski’s staff also appeared to believe that it was their role to help Brzezinski enhance his power at Vance’s expense. In a Michel Oksenberg and William Odom memo to Brzezinski preceding an SCC meeting in February 1979, they forecast not only that Vance would attempt to delay a trip by Treasury Secretary Mike Blumenthal to China and advocated that Brzezinski needed to do everything possible to ensure that the Blumenthal trip take

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

place, but they also stated that “Your bureaucratic objective here is to make sure that Cy is not in charge of” the UN resolutions regarding the Sino-Vietnamese conflict, implying that Vance would undermine the U.S. policy on getting Chinese and Vietnamese forces to withdraw.¹²⁵ It was remarkable that two NSC aides felt it appropriate to challenge the Secretary of State’s commitment to U.S. policy. This behavior occurred in large part because Brzezinski set a tone on the NSC that encouraged it, and Carter presided over a planning system that promoted counterproductive competition.

Vance therefore found himself in the discouraging and infuriating position of having to fight serious bureaucratic battles with Brzezinski and his staff, and at the same time needing to address serious foreign policy problems -- problems that he not only had not created, but had cautioned against. Warren Christopher detailed that the “Zbig-drive early announcement” exacted a number of policy prices, with the most serious one being in the area of Soviet relations. Christopher pointed out, for example, that because “Gromyko erupted in anger over the timing of the announcement” during a meeting with Vance in Geneva a week after the announcement, the administration “could not complete the SALT II agreement with the Soviets, and the anticipated

¹²⁵ Michel Oksenberg and William Odom, "Objectives for Today's SCC Meeting on the Sino-Vietnamese Conflict, February 19, 1979," *Declassified Documents Reference System* (Galenet), <http://0-galenet/galegroup.comlibrary.laus.georgetown.edu/servi/>.

Carter-Brezhnev summit meeting had to be postponed.”¹²⁶ In addition, the Soviets took note at the December 21-23 meetings that Brzezinski appeared to be “giving the secretary of state strict instructions” about what and how Vance could negotiate – a situation that Dobrynin described as “rather embarrassing to us” and for Vance.¹²⁷ Soviet anger also flared when a joint U.S.-Chinese statement issued upon the Chinese Vice-Premier’s departure from the United States used the word “hegemony” to refer to the Soviet Union in the statement. As reported in the *Washington Post*, the “official Soviet news agency Tass earlier today denounced Deng’s remarks and called on the Carter administration to clarify its position toward the Soviet Union.”¹²⁸ The *Post* further noted that “the official press and Soviet sources have made clear in the weeks since full Chinese-American diplomatic relations were announced in December the Kremlin’s alarm over possible future actions by Peking and Washington against Moscow.”¹²⁹ It was left to Vance to mollify Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin during a meeting about SALT, and to assure Dobrynin a month later that the United States did

¹²⁶ Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, 91.

¹²⁷ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 414.

¹²⁸ Kevin Klose, "Soviets Ask U.S. to Clarify China Policy," *The Washington Post*, February 2 1979, sec. A, p. 1.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

not have a “anti-Soviet, pro-China attitude” that encouraged China to launch a brief border attack on Soviet-supported Vietnam.¹³⁰

Furthermore, because Carter chose to disregard Vance’s, Christopher’s, and Holbrooke’s advice about the critical need to consult with Congress about normalization,¹³¹ key congressional leaders were livid after the normalization announcement, a situation that created enormous issues of credibility for Vance in his dealings with them.¹³² Conservatives in Congress castigated the President’s actions regarding Taiwan as “the greatest act of appeasement by any Western leader since Neville Chamberlain.”¹³³ Israel privately, but aggressively condemned Carter’s decision as if the Taiwan decision meant that the United States would likewise be willing to abandon Israel as an ally.¹³⁴

Finally, by early 1979, media coverage in the United States, which affected how other countries viewed U.S. foreign policy competency, again suggested that a foreign policy schism was impairing the administration’s effectiveness. One representative

¹³⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 121-122.

¹³¹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 118.

¹³² Ibid. and Patrick Tyler, “The (Ab)normalization of U.S.-Chinese Relations,” 122.

¹³³ David Butler, “After China, On to SALT,” *Newsweek*, January 1, 1979, p. 28.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

article by Don Oberdorfer in the *Washington Post* stressed that that Carter had not yet revealed his own strategic views, observed that he demonstrated a tendency to do “good things badly,” and described the administration’s foreign policymaking as being in serious disarray.¹³⁵ Oberdorfer contended that the policy schism was between Vance and Brzezinski, who “represent fundamentally different views of U.S. policy.”¹³⁶ Repeating a White House aide’s characterization of Brzezinski as “the first Pole in 300 years in a position to really stick it to the Russians,” Oberdorfer maintained that Brzezinski viewed Moscow’s actions “in a global pattern” and was therefore prone to “contention and confrontation.”¹³⁷ Characterizing Vance as “unimpressed with the ‘Russians are coming’ arguments,” he submitted that Vance viewed “conflicts in the world periphery in local terms where they can be most effectively handled.”¹³⁸ Oberdorfer’s portrayal of Carter as an uncertain leader, Brzezinski as a pugnacious anti-Soviet advisor, and Vance as a nuanced negotiator would become part of the accepted media narrative of Carter presidency, in part because it was easy to document these perceptions.

¹³⁵ Don Oberdorfer, "Carter As Foreign Policy Manager," *The Washington Post*, February 18, 1979, sec. C, p. 4.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Why did Vance not resign in early 1979? Carter had allowed Brzezinski to control the Chinese normalization process, establish at a minimum the tone and orientation of U.S-China policy in a way that undermined SALT, and allowed Brzezinski to act as the administration's foreign policy spokesman on China. Carter's decisions posed serious challenges to Vance's ability to do his job effectively and to maintain U.S. policy on a consistent course. The media scrutinized the administration's pronouncements for increasing evidence of debilitating tension between Vance and Brzezinski. Three explanations exist for Vance's decision to remain on the job and to continue his fight for the strategic principles he believed to be prudent and critical.

First, it was not in Vance's nature to quit anything or to give in easily. He was as persistent as Brzezinski, but in a quieter way. Indeed, in January 1979, as Vance prepared a paper for Carter to prepare him for Deng's upcoming visit to the United States, he used this opportunity to reiterate aggressively the case for a balanced approach to China and the Soviet Union – an important indicator that he believed he still had or could regain substantial influence with Carter. Vance pointed out that Deng would likely express his view that SALT was an act of weakness, and would attempt to persuade the United States to abandon its policy of evenhandedness on export controls or Most Favored Nation policies. Vance counseled Carter to consider that even if Deng regarded the Chinese relationship with the U.S. as anti-Soviet power move, the United States needed to emphasize that for the United States:

...these agreements and rapidly expanding relations are important because they draw the Chinese further into involvement with us and the rest of the world....In regard to the Soviet Union, in its simplest terms, we want to use the visit to demonstrate to Deng that the United States remains the world's strongest nation; that a SALT treaty will not be to our or to Chinese disadvantage; and that we will respond as necessary to Soviet attempts to change the strategic balance in other parts of the world.¹³⁹

Vance was also deeply committed to championing a SALT agreement because he believed it was essential for the United States' future security and that other benefits would flow from a solid arms control agreement. Importantly, in the spring of 1979, when Vance was dealing with negative fallout from the China normalization, Carter emphasized publicly that SALT negotiations were critical to him, and that he and Vance considered it a priority.¹⁴⁰ His statement once again implied that he and Vance were on the same page, and Vance was his primary foreign policy aide. Moreover, at that time, Carter returned to repeating Vance's assertions that SALT should not be linked to other events, and attempted to explain the merits of that position. For example, Carter acknowledged that because the SALT treaty was in the country's best interest and enhanced the prospect for peace, "We cannot say to the Soviet Union, 'Unless all Cuban

¹³⁹ Cyrus Vance, "Scope Paper for the Visit of Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping, January 26, 1979," *Declassified Documents Reference System* (Galenet), <http://0-galenet/galegroup.comlibrary.laus.georgetown.edu/servi/>.

¹⁴⁰ Jimmy Carter, "Interview with the President, February 9, 1979," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=31903>.

troops are removed from Angola we will never sign a SALT agreement with you’.”¹⁴¹

Carter likened the United States linking SALT to the removal of Cuban troops in Angola to the Soviet Union saying to the United States: “Unless you withdraw all your troops from South Korea, unless you reduce your military strength in NATO, unless you sever your relationship with Egypt, unless you permit us to come into the Mideast situation as a full negotiating partner, we will not sign a SALT agreement.”¹⁴² Carter’s message was a re-expression of Vance’s strategic theme that the United States needed to commit itself “to cooperate with the Soviets whenever we can, to lessen tensions, to cooperate on trade, to try to detect common purpose where we can cooperate, to conclude agreements that might lessen tension and improve the possibility for peace.”¹⁴³

And indeed, when Carter met with Deng on January 29, 1979, Carter forcefully presented the benefits of a SALT agreement, and asked Deng to affirm publicly that China did not oppose a SALT treaty. Responding to Carter’s request, Deng said he would emphasize that although China did not oppose arms control, he believed that

¹⁴¹ Jimmy Carter, "Foreign Policy Conference for Editors and Broadcasters," *The American Presidency Project*, February 22, 1979, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=31941>.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

“wherever the Soviet Union sticks its fingers, there we must chop them off.”¹⁴⁴ Carter then asserted that the United States would aggressively address Soviet “adventurism” without backing off of the commitment to SALT.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, Carter once again articulated U.S. policies in a way that would be useful to Vance in bringing the SALT negotiations to a successful closure. Such affirmations by Carter about his commitment to SALT were indeed inducements to Vance to remain in his position.

Finally, it was highly likely that Vance did not resign over these significant assaults to policy and person because he was deeply concerned about Brzezinski’s foreign policy goals and wanted to prevent him from achieving them. Vance later admitted that Brzezinski’s behavior in China “disturbed me” because “loose talk about ‘playing the China card,’ always a dangerous ploy, was a particularly risky move at a time when we were at a sensitive point in the SALT negotiations.”¹⁴⁶

Thus, Vance remained as secretary of state because he believed he would have other opportunities to advance his principles and because he believed it was imperative to counter Brzezinski’s strategic approach to the Soviet Union. Vance’s plate became

¹⁴⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Memorandum of Conversations. Summary of the President's Meeting with the People's Republic of China Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping, January 29, 1979," *Declassified Documents Reference System* (Galenet), <http://0-galenet/galegroup.comlibrary.laus.georgetown.edu/servi/>.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 116.

fuller with the issues created by the Iranian Revolution. Vance, however, would treat the Iranian issues in a way that was consistent with his approaches to the Horn of Africa and China: these were at their core local issues that needed to be resolved in ways that removed them from the East-West context and that also served U.S. interests.

CHAPTER 7. THE IRANIAN CHALLENGE

When Cyrus Vance prepared a memorandum for presidential candidate Jimmy Carter in the fall of 1976 on the most pressing foreign policy issues confronting the United States, he highlighted, in addition to issues regarding NATO and the North-South relationship, such significant issues as the importance of supporting arms control and détente with the Soviet Union, the need to develop policies toward Africa that removed Africa as much as possible from the East-West context, and the opportunities to work toward normalization of a formal relationship with China. Given that Vance ultimately resigned from office because of his profound disagreement with Carter about a military rescue of American hostages in Iran, it was ironic that Vance's foreign policy survey mentioned Iran only once and that was in the context of "maintaining friendly and cooperative relations with the Arab States and with Iran."¹

In January 1978, Iranian police brutally assaulted religious students and clerics in the holy city of Qum for protesting the Shah of Iran's policies and a government

¹ Vance included this "Overview of Foreign Policy Issues and Positions" in his memoirs. His discussion of Iran is at: Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 447.

attack on the character of religious leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.² The revolution that took off from these bloody demonstrations was not on Vance's late 1976 policy screen. Vance's failure to foresee the myriad challenges presented by the Shah of Iran's crumbling regime and the ensuing Islamic government was not unusual. In 1976-1977, few foreign policy analysts or officials were concerned about Iran for two reasons: first, U.S. relations with Iran appeared to be strong and stable; and second, relative to other areas of the world with serious military, political, or economic issues, Iran did not seem to merit substantial attention. Gary Sick, an NSC advisor to Zbigniew Brzezinski, pointed out that during the summer of 1976, some Foreign Service officials had alluded to the fact that the strategic and energy importance of Iran resulted in the government of Iran being able to exert "determining influence" in the relationship with the United States. Nevertheless, these officials did not consider this influence as particularly destabilizing because there was "no effective internal challenge" to the Shah. In their view, the major Iranian foreign policy problem was that "many Americans deplored the authoritarian nature" of the Shah, and that "unrestrained arms transfer" policies could eventually "lead to a conflagration rather than stability in this area."³ Indeed, even when stability in Iran was disintegrating in 1978, it did not

² James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 235.

³ Gary Sick, *All Fall Down. America's Tragic Encounter with Iran*, (New York: Penguin, 1986), 24.

command the administration's strong attention because the crisis seemed manageable. As Brzezinski emphasized, "Until the crisis became very grave, the attention of the top decision makers, myself included, was riveted on other issues, all extraordinarily time-consuming, personally absorbing and physically demanding. Our decision-making circuits were overloaded."⁴

Even though few historians have produced comprehensive histories of the Carter administration, the Iranian Revolution has attracted scholars, as well as former members and affiliates of the Carter administration, to assess not only why it occurred, but also the degree to which U.S. policies affected outcomes. In addition to the perceptions offered by Carter, Vance, and Brzezinski in their memoirs, the former U.S. Ambassador to Iran William H. Sullivan, Carter aide and hostage negotiator Hamilton Jordan, NSC staffer Gary Sick, and State Department officials Warren Christopher, Harold Saunders, George Ball, and others, have written histories or extensive articles concerning aspects of the Iranian Revolution, the dynamics of the policymaking process, and a history of the diplomacy undertaken to release "the 52 to 66 Americans held for 14½ months by hundreds of Iranians in dozens of places in addition to the embassy."⁵ Among the scholars who have focused on the roots and impacts of the revolution, Iran scholar

⁴ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 358.

⁵ Robert McFadden, Joseph B. Treaster, and Maurice Carroll, *No Hiding Place. Inside Report on the Hostage Crisis* (New York: Times Books, 1981), 5.

James Bill has drawn on his research and interviews with both Western and Iranian sources, as well as his personal experiences in Iran, to explain that “dramatic developments in Iran-U.S. relations are to be found as much in the complex context of internal Iranian politics as in the American policy-making environment.”⁶ Why have historians and others focused on Iran, much to the exclusion of other issues, during the Carter administration? As Brzezinski suggested:

Iran was the Carter Administration’s greatest setback...the fall of the Shah was disastrous strategically for the United States and politically for Carter himself....It undid the political benefits of his effective leadership in obtaining the Camp David Agreements, it obscured public appreciation of his boldness in achieving normalization of relations with China...it hurt his image as a world leader in the very mid-point of the first Presidential term....Finally, by setting in motion circumstances that led eventually to the seizure of the American hostages in Tehran, the fall of the Shah contributed centrally to Carter’s political defeat.⁷

The policymaking failures that characterized the United States’ response to the Iranian Revolution tarnished not only Carter, who was ultimately responsible for them, but also Brzezinski and Vance. In Vance’s case, the fact that the Iranian Revolution occurred on his watch as secretary of state, meant that he not only needed to explain the reasons behind the administration’s loss of Iran as a key strategic ally, but also that he felt personally responsible for failing to guarantee the safety of the personnel in the U.S. embassy in Iran.

⁶ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 6.

⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 354, 389.

This chapter focuses on how Vance and Brzezinski, prior to February 1979, engaged in a major policy battle concerning what measures to take in response to the Shah's crumbling authority in Iran. It will detail Brzezinski's commitment to employing the "Iron Fist," first by encouraging the Shah to crack down firmly on opposition, and then, when that was no longer feasible, by encouraging Carter to support or undertake a military coup. Brzezinski's advocacy of the "Iron Fist," Vance's opposition to it, and Carter's mixed and changing messages about it were important, not only because the "Iron Fist" debate was the central conflict of U.S. policymaking regarding Iran, but also because this debate presaged Carter's decisionmaking process regarding the hostage rescue mission. In addition, the chapter will briefly examine Brzezinski's blatant attempts to undercut Vance's and the State Department's Iranian positions, and to advance his own position through direct negotiations with Iranian officials -- a situation that George Ball described as "a shockingly unhealthy situation in the National Security Council."⁸ And in presenting this analysis, it will point out that whereas Carter was actively involved in the day-to-day policymaking regarding SALT, the Horn of Africa, and China, even though some of that involvement was not coherent or consistent, he "did not engage himself actively in the day-to-day policymaking

⁸ Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 462.

during the Iran crisis in the same way ...”⁹ The upshot of this was that Brzezinski had more freedom to maneuver, and Vance needed to expend more energy to attempt to get Carter to hold to his positions.

The Historical Context

According to James Bill, the U.S. relationship with Iran prior to the Iranian Revolution reflected: “Flaws of massive ignorance, bureaucratic conflict, Soviet-centricity, economic obsessions, and the prevalence of informal or privatized decisionmaking.”¹⁰ Even though American policymakers had a highly imperfect understanding of the political and cultural dynamics of Iran, they valued its strategic importance, with its location on the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, its status as a land bridge between the Middle East and Asia.”¹¹ At the time of the 1973 Arab embargo, Iran demonstrated its strategic importance to the West when the Shah refused to join the embargo and continued to be “the major supplier of oil to Israel.”¹²

⁹ Alexander Moens, "President Carter's Advisors and the Fall of the Shah," *Political Science Quarterly* 106, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 221.

¹⁰ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 2.

¹¹ Christopher, *American Hostages in Iran*, 2.

¹² U.S. Department of State, "Annual Policy and Resource Assessment for Iran. Part 1," *National Digital Security Archives*, April 5, 1977, <http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com.library.lauys.georgetown.edu/>, 164.

Moreover, by the mid 1970s, Iran held about 10 percent of the proven petroleum reserves of the world, and was the second largest exporter of oil.¹³ In addition, the United States had strong economic ties to Iran as it was the largest exporter of non-military as well as military goods and services to Iran.¹⁴

At the end of World War II, the United States and Iran were “drawn together” as the two countries addressed “containing Soviet expansionist policies.”¹⁵ The United States earned the respect of many Iranians as it supported their independence struggles against Great Britain and Russia.¹⁶ However, in 1953, the United States actively supported the overthrow of Muhammad Musaddiq, an Iranian nationalist who had “one preeminent political preoccupation: a thorough opposition to foreign intervention and interference in Iran.”¹⁷ Under Musaddiq’s leadership, Iran had nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which was “the most traumatic experience to afflict the international oil industry in the past forty-five years,”¹⁸ and also ended diplomatic

¹³ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 6.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of State, "Annual Policy and Resource Assessment for Iran. Part 1, 165.

¹⁵ Ibid., 156.

¹⁶ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 5

¹⁷ Ibid., 56.

¹⁸ Ibid., 66.

relations with Great Britain in 1952. By 1953, Musaddiq confronted serious political and economic issues, and alienated the support of the religious right. U.S. officials feared that he would have no choice but to turn to the Communist Tudeh party for support. In response, the United States and Great Britain helped to plan and carry out Musaddiq's overthrow, and ensured that Muhammad Reza Pahlavi would return to power.¹⁹ As Westad has pointed out, this action was "in many ways a new departure for US foreign policy in the Third World," because it was "the first time Washington had organized in detail the overthrow of a foreign government outside its own hemisphere."²⁰ The United States' actions provoked the condemnation of both moderate, nationalistic Iranians and leftist radicals. As Bill stressed: "The fall of Musaddiq marked the end of a century of American-Iranian friendship and began a new era of intervention and growing hostility for the United States among the awakened forces of Iranian nationalism."²¹

During the 1950s, the United States solidified its relations with the government of the autocratic Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. The Shah received advanced weapons and military training support from the United States, ensured that Iran supplied oil to the West, and acted as the guarantor of the small, conservative states in the region. The

¹⁹ Ibid., 66-67.

²⁰ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 122.

²¹ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 96.

Shah confronted political instability in Iran between January 1960 and January 1963 in part by developing a program of reform, the White Revolution -- much to the pleasure of the Kennedy Administration which had advocated that Iran adopt administrative, economic and social reforms.²² Many of the Shah's ambitious modernization efforts, however, produced unintended consequences, including strong opposition by some political and religious groups and crackdowns on this opposition by the Shah's government.²³ As Alexander Moens has explained, "The Shiite leaders, the mullahs, saw the White Revolution as a large-scale import of western values. They resisted the Shah's land and social reforms."²⁴ Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a mujtahid known as an authority on Islamic mysticism, challenged the Shah's relationship with the United States: "They are friends of the dollar. They have no religion, no loyalty."²⁵ In 1963, the Shah and SAVAK, his security and intelligence agency, responded to this internal challenge by breaking the massive riots led by Khomeini and imprisoning him. Khomeini was then exiled in 1964 for 14 years.

The Shah attempted to use Iran's petroleum reserves to finance rapid structural changes, including programs promoting land reform, economic modernization, and

²² Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 141-149.

²³ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 289-291.

²⁴ Moens, "President Carter's Advisors and the Fall of the Shah," 213-214.

²⁵ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 291.

economic growth. On the other hand, the Shah's corruption, his pro-western policies, his military spending, his autocratic rule, and the abuses by SAVAK alienated the Iranian people, including leaders in the Shia clergy. The Shah responded to the criticism by reducing the Iranian parliamentary process to a one-party system, and by taking other measures to consolidate his autocratic rule in 1975.

During 1976, Iran was beset by serious economic and social issues, in part created by too much money being injected into an economy that had constraints on how much it could absorb. As Westad has pointed out, "by 1975 inflation was rampant, corruption and economic inequity on the rise, and speculation in land undermining the effects of land reform."²⁶ In response, the Shah took a number of actions, including increasing taxes, increasing foreign borrowing, setting minimum wages to quell labor unrest, instituting price controls, and clamping down on tax evasion. Nevertheless, the Shah had managed to maximize the number of enemies of his one-party government: "by the late 1970s it was not only the Left, the clergy, and the big landowners who saw the Iranian state as exploitative, brutal, and unjust, so also did large numbers of workers, the new middle class, shopkeepers, and industrialists."²⁷

When the Carter administration took office, Vance stressed that: "Carter, Brown, Brzezinski and I recognized the importance of Iranian Persian Gulf security

²⁶ Ibid., 292.

²⁷ Ibid., 293.

matters. Nevertheless we were also determined to hew to our position on human rights and to our goal of restraining the sale of American weapons.”²⁸ Indeed, on May 13, 1977, Carter issued Presidential Directive/NSC-13, which stipulated that “we must restrain the transfer of conventional arms by recognizing that arms transfers are an exceptional foreign policy implement, to be used only in instances where it can be clearly demonstrated that the transfers contribute to our national security interests.”²⁹ By alerting the Shah that he might no longer have access to the arms he requested from the United States, Carter signaled that he would strive to balance strategic considerations with his commitment to reducing unnecessary arms sales.

Nevertheless, during the first year of the administration, Carter and U.S. officials attempted to assure the Shah that even though his human rights record needed great improvement, the United States highly valued its relationship with Iran. On May 15, 1977, after Carter had issued Presidential Directive/NSC-13, Vance gave a speech to the Central Treaty Organization in which he emphasized that “human rights is central to United States foreign policy,” and added, “There is a very practical aspect to it.”³⁰ The practical aspect was that “each country’s growth, prosperity and stability sooner or

²⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 316.

²⁹ Jimmy Carter, "Presidential Directive/NSC-13, May 13, 1977," *Jimmy Carter Library.org*, <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/pddirectives/pd14.pdf1977>.

³⁰ Charles Mohr, "Vance, in Iran, Asserts Stability Depends on Rights," *The New York Times*, May 15, 1977, sec. A, p. 3.

later depend upon its ability to meet the aspirations of its people for human rights.”³¹

U.S. officials followed up Vance’s mild human rights prod by emphasizing that “the United States views the trends in Iranian civil liberties as ‘favorable’ and that any diplomatic or economic sanctions against the Shah were virtually out of the question.”³²

Indeed, when the Shah visited the United States in November 1977 to have bilateral talks about economic ties and military supply issues, Carter effusively praised the Shah and Iran. He commented that the Shah had expanded educational opportunity and access to good health care. He praised Iran for its strong military, its strong political system, and its strong commitment to “the spirit of its people.”³³ Moreover, Carter described the Shah as a man who had earned the trust of his people and that of other countries: “Even those that historically have been enemies now look upon the Shah and the people of Iran with a great deal of confidence and trust.”³⁴ Carter also observed that Iran was a “stabilizing influence on that region, indeed throughout the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean, with a growing degree of influence, in the Western World, in Japan, and

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Jimmy Carter, "Visit of the Shah of Iran. Toasts of the President and the Shah at a Dinner Honoring the Shah, November 15, 1977," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print/php?pid=6983>.

³⁴ Ibid.

in Africa.”³⁵ And, when Carter visited Iran at the end of December 1977, he contrasted the turmoil in the Horn of Africa with the peace and prosperity of Iran, and uttered words that would soon haunt and taunt his presidency:

Iran, because of the great leadership of the Shah, is an island of stability in one of the most troubled areas of the world. This is a great tribute to you, Your Majesty, and to your leadership and to the respect and the admiration and love which your people give to you.³⁶

Iran, however, was not an island of stability. Throughout 1978, “not a month passed without major anti-regime demonstrations,” including violent riots and bloody confrontations.³⁷ Khomeini issued periodic proclamations that praised Islam and those rebelling against the Shah, condemned the Shah, and denounced the United States for supporting the Pahlavian regime.³⁸ In 1978, groups of nationalists, Islamists, Marxists, and others united to oppose the Shah’s abuses. The Shah did not find an effective response, nor was he able to get the United States to tell him what to do, as he desired. As Vance pointed out, “The Shah refused either to halt the political liberation measures

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Jimmy Carter, "Toasts of the President and the Shah at a State Dinner in Tehran, December 31, 1977," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print/php?pid=7080>.

³⁷ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 236.

³⁸ Ibid., 239.

he had adopted in 1977 or to crack down ruthlessly on the opposition.”³⁹ By August 1978, it was clear that the Shah’s promise of open elections for parliament in June 1979 was not going to create secular support for his regime.

From October 1978 through the middle of January 1979, the Shah’s position became untenable as the multiple forces against him grew in strength, and he became increasingly ineffectual in mounting any kind of response, political or military, that would allow him to continue in power. On January 16, the Shah left Iran without a decision about a permanent home. In February 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini, the exiled religious leader, returned to Iran from France. Assuming control of the Revolution, he acted as the Supreme Leader of a theocratic republic guided by Islamic principles until June 1989. Unnerved by Khomeini’s takeover on many levels, Carter’s advisors were seriously divided about how to resolve the Iranian crisis and to develop a new policy toward revolutionary Iran.⁴⁰ As Brzezinski stressed, Iran was centrally important “to the safeguarding of American and, more generally, Western interests in the oil region of the Persian Gulf.”⁴¹ Nevertheless, “formidable obstacles” confronted U.S. policymakers as they sought to preserve U.S. interests, including the confusing nature of Iranian politics, the lack of good information about Iran or even an understanding of

³⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 324.

⁴⁰ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 276.

⁴¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 354.

“the dynamics of the revolution,” and “Iranian paranoia” about the U.S. relationship with the Shah.⁴²

Infuriated by the administration’s decision to admit the Shah to the United States for medical reasons, Iranian student militants, with the support of Khomeini, seized the U.S. Embassy and its occupants on November 4, 1979. For 444 days, until the day of Ronald Reagan’s inauguration, fifty two of the hostages remained in captivity -- a situation that created outrage and concern in the United States. As Steven R. Weisman observed, “More than anything else, Americans encountered in Iran a symbol of their impotence...The hostage crisis illuminated the extent to which the United States could prove itself unable to protect its vital strategic and economic interests, as well as its citizens.”⁴³ The Carter administration employed a full range of diplomatic activities to secure the release of the hostages and then a range of non belligerent measures. On April 7, 1980, the United States broke diplomatic relations with Iran, and four days later Carter authorized a military hostage rescue mission to take place on April 24. Not only was the hostage rescue mission unsuccessful in achieving its purpose, but eight U.S. servicemen died in the effort. Carter lost human treasure and professional credibility in this rescue attempt, as well as a secretary of state who had counseled against it.

⁴² Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 276-277.

⁴³ McFadden, *No Hiding Place*, 227.

This brief description of the historical roots of the U.S. relationship with Iran during the Carter administration suggests that multiple, serious challenges were posed by the Iranian revolution, including how to safeguard U.S. interests while acknowledging Iranian autonomy, how to address in a humane way the needs of a former, dependent ally, and importantly how to secure the safe release of the U.S. hostages. As discussed in the next sections, these challenges produced a fundamental policy debate: should the United States support the “Iron Fist”?

The Policy Battle over the “Iron Fist”

From October 1978 until the end of February 1979, the Carter administration considered a range of options, first for supporting the Shah and then for preventing Iran from being controlled by Khomeini. Among these options were the strong military measures advocated by Brzezinski, often with support from officials in the Departments of Energy and Defense, to stabilize Iran. At first, the “Iron Fist” referred to measures that the United States might adopt to encourage the Shah to quash the rebellion forcibly. When the Shah ultimately chose not to do this, “Iron Fist” policies shifted to support for a military coup in Iran, either by the military or by the military with substantial U.S. support. Vance challenged Brzezinski’s proposals with arguments that a military approach was not only inconsistent with U.S. values and long-term strategic goals, but was also not viable. No one won the argument, however, because as Brzezinski noted:

“The Shah did not act; the military did not move; Washington never ordered a coup.”⁴⁴

Nevertheless, the result of these deliberations was that Brzezinski was strengthened, and Vance was continuously assaulted for promoting soft, non-strategic policies.

The “Iron Fist” and the Shah

Throughout the first half of 1978, sporadic protests occurred in Iran that appeared to have multiple causes: a declining economy, reactions to the Shah’s repressive measures, corruption charges, and inflation. However, as Vance observed, “the magnet that drew the dissidents together was the religious opposition to the Shah.”⁴⁵ This opposition had seriously intensified in January 1978 when police fired on religious demonstrators (supporters of the exiled Khomeini) in Qum, a center for Islamic teaching. Not only did the Shah confront a serious control problem, but “the more forcefully his police suppressed disorder, the stronger became the mullahs’ ability to arouse new protests.”⁴⁶

U.S. policymakers grappled with how best to assist the Shah in restoring order in the short term and also in establishing the conditions for longer term stability. As Brzezinski explained, even before the Shah’s regime was in dire straits, the United

⁴⁴ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 393.

⁴⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 324.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

States had made attempts to strengthen him. Brzezinski asserted that Iran's "strategic centrality" mandated that the United States approve huge sales of arms to Iran during 1978, but also obliged the Carter administration to encourage the Shah to "modernize his country with more rapid progress toward constitutional rule."⁴⁷ Brzezinski acknowledged that "we did not have, nor did we feel we could have, a detailed blueprint for how quick and extensive such political change ought to be."⁴⁸ Even so, as Vance admitted, "It would not be correct to assume from the foregoing that prior to September the situation in Iran was a subject of daily concern to the president or me."⁴⁹ Vance stressed that the administration's sources of information, including the ambassador to Iran, Iranian experts in the State Department, the CIA, and other agencies and foreign governments, believed that the Shah might need to encourage and accept political compromises, but if he did that, he would not be "in serious danger."⁵⁰

The Shah's situation became more precarious in September and October 1978 as the Shah unsuccessfully confronted more demonstrations that appeared to be the product of "a massive outpouring of pent-up economic, political, religious, and social

⁴⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 357.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 326.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

forces.”⁵¹ The consensus in the U.S. government was that the Shah, suffering from a lack of confidence, concerned that the United States was plotting against him, and pleading with the United States for advice and support, did not know what to do. Vance’s colleagues in the State Department informed him that they believed that the litany of significant negative events -- the failure of martial law to achieve stability, the huge decline in oil production from 6 million to 1 million barrels a day, the loss in the government’s foreign exchange earnings, the Shah’s refusal to offer a meaningful share of power to those that might ally with him, Khomeini’s ability to instigate demonstrations from Paris -- meant that “the Shah’s autocratic reign was over.”⁵² According to State Department analysts, “...the only questions now were how much power the Shah must relinquish, and to whom.”⁵³ Concerned that anti-regime forces were increasingly attracted to the stability offered by the Islamic clergy, State Department analysts still believed that the military generals and the secular political opposition provided a viable political alternative.

On October 24, 1978, the Shah informed U.S. Ambassador William H. Sullivan and British Ambassador Anthony Parsons that he was considering two options: first, a military government; and second, a coalition cabinet of civilians, including some

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 327.

⁵³ Ibid.

opposition members. And the Shah wanted to know: would the United States government support a military government? Key Carter aides formed different answers to that question. Secretary of Energy James Schlesinger, Deputy Defense Secretary Charles Duncan, and over time Defense Secretary Harold Brown agreed with Brzezinski that “a military solution in Iran was the only way to avoid complete collapse.”⁵⁴ Vance, on the other hand, countered that “we were operating with too limited an understanding of Iranian political realities to give such far-reaching advice to the Shah at this time.”⁵⁵ He further argued that the State Department and Ambassador Sullivan had valid reasons for opposing increased military involvement in the political arena, namely that the Iranian military had been discredited by recent events and had shown no capacity to govern or to rally public support.

And so, the debate about the merits and necessity for the “Iron Fist” began in earnest. At the heart of the debate were different responses to a question posed by Brzezinski: “What was the nature of our central interest in Iran, and thus what was truly at stake and must be protected as our first priority?”⁵⁶ Brzezinski answered that the U.S. stake was “largely a geopolitical one, which focused on the central importance of Iran to the safeguarding of the American and, more generally Western interest in the oil

⁵⁴ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 358.

⁵⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 328.

⁵⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 354.

region of the Persian Gulf.”⁵⁷ Brzezinski acknowledged that Vance shared his strategic concerns, but suggested that Vance, Deputy Secretary Christopher, and Under Secretary David Newsom “were much more preoccupied with the goal of promoting the democratization of Iran, and feared actions -- U.S. or Iranian -- that might have the opposite effect.”⁵⁸

Not only were Brzezinski’s perceptions of the State Department’s position distorted, but he lacked something that Vance’s analysts possessed: an accurate understanding of capabilities of the Iranian military, something that Vance, given his military background was keenly attentive to. Until the Shah left Iran in 1979, the State Department was highly skeptical that the military could produce stability under any circumstances. Critiquing Brzezinski’s embrace of the military solution, David Newsom pointed out: “I remember one time when Dr. Brzezinski said he couldn’t understand why an army of 300,000 couldn’t put down the troubles happening in Iran. What he didn’t realize was that half of the 300,000 were conscripts, and that when the Shah weakened there was no military command structure that could really take action.”⁵⁹ At any rate, within the administration, Brzezinski not only became a vocal

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 355.

⁵⁹ David D. Newsom, "Interview with Ambassador David D. Newsom, June 17, 1991," *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, CD-Rom*.

proponent for a military solution to the problems in Iran, but also increasingly inserted himself into a role of negotiating and communicating with Iranian officials about the need for firmness.

Brzezinski, in response to the U.S. and British ambassadors to Iran telling the Shah that “in their view a military solution was a nonstarter,” vigorously lobbied Carter -- unsuccessfully -- to send him to Iran to bolster the Shah’s resolve. Brzezinski also refused to circulate a memorandum, prepared by the State Department, which analyzed the current Iranian situation and emphatically stated: “The United States should maintain steadfast opposition to a military regime.”⁶⁰ Alexander Moen pointedly criticized Brzezinski’s action regarding the State Department’s memorandum: “Rather than use the document as a basis for debate within the administration, he played down its message. He failed to give all reasonable options a fair hearing, and he failed to elevate the substantial disagreement between the advisors and himself to the president.”⁶¹

Brzezinski’s next step was to convene and chair a meeting of the SCC on November 3, 1978 to explore options for supporting the Shah. Prior to the meeting, Brzezinski established the tone and content for the meeting in a memorandum to the president: “Unless the Shah can combine constructive concessions with a firm hand, he

⁶⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 362.

⁶¹ Moens, "President Carter's Advisors and the Fall of the Shah," 222.

will be devastated.”⁶² During the exchange of opinions at the meeting, Christopher, representing the State Department in Vance’s absence, made the case that a coalition government “might still be the best way to provide movement toward a lasting settlement”; Brown offered that a military government might be justified as a preparatory step for elections; CIA Director Stansfield Turner argued for a coalition government; and David Aaron of the NSC suggested that the Department of State’s focus on reform might suggest to the Shah that the United States “cared more for liberalization than for his own leadership.”⁶³

At the conclusion of the meeting, Brzezinski obtained Carter’s and Vance’s agreement to instruct Ambassador Sullivan that the United States recognized “the need for decisive action and leadership to restore order and his own authority,” and maintained “confidence in the Shah’s judgment regarding the specific decisions that may be needed concerning the form and composition of government.”⁶⁴ Sullivan was to impress upon the Shah that the United States would not show a preference about the form of government: either a coalition or military government would be supported by the United States. In addition, Brzezinski emphasized that a military government under the Shah would be “overwhelmingly preferable to a military government without the

⁶² Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 362.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 364.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Shah.”⁶⁵ Brzezinski revealed that the next day Carter authorized him to speak to the Shah in order to convey to him that the United States supported him, and “to encourage him to act forcefully before the situation got out of hand.”⁶⁶ Although Brzezinski maintained that some historical accounts have distorted his remarks, he clearly signaled to the Shah a preference for a military solution when he stated: “It is a critical situation, in a sense, and concessions alone are likely to produce a more explosive situation” -- a statement that the Shah asked him to repeat.⁶⁷ Not only was Brzezinski acting as U.S. spokesperson for Iranian policy and engaging in critical conversations with a head of state -- functions appropriately belonging to Vance as secretary of state, but he was clearly emphasizing his preferred policy, not a policy that the administration had embraced.

That same day, Vance held a news conference in which he communicated a very different message. In response to the question, “Could you explain how the United States believes that it will be possible for you, at one and the same time, to restore order and continue liberalization?,” Vance clarified:

I think that they are not at all inconsistent. I think that law and order can be restored. I think at the same time one can continue along the course which the Shah has charted for himself and for his nation. As you know, he has set forth a

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 365.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

plan which would lead to elections in the year 1979; and there is no inconsistency in reestablishing stability in the nation and moving on subsequently to the holding to his liberalization plan.⁶⁸

By mid November, it was evident that any liberalization program, in fact any parliamentary government in Iran, was highly unlikely. Cyrus Vance had received a State Department assessment of the "Gathering Crisis in Iran" which maintained that the "Shah's attempts to appease his opponents have failed," and that "the opposition is coalescing and gaining momentum, while he loses the initiative."⁶⁹ The State Department study suggested that the Shah had only two choices: to remain as a constitutional monarch with "severely limited powers," which could allow a coalition of moderate secular politicians to govern the country with the backing of moderate religious leaders, or to abdicate, an action that might trigger a military takeover. The study concluded that:

Unless the Shah acts very soon, the chances of military intervention are high. Order imposed by the Army probably would not last more than six months. The economy has been damaged, and the ordinary Iranian has learned that, even without guns, he can exercise strong political power. There is no way that the

⁶⁸ Cyrus R. Vance, "News Conference by the Honorable Cyrus R. Vance, November 3, 1978," *Digital National Security Archive*, http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com/cgi-bin/cqcgi?CQ_SESSION_KEY=TKGIJPSCDGOR7C.

⁶⁹ David E. Mark, "The Gathering Crisis in Iran, November 2, 1978," *National Digital Security Archive*, <http://0-nsarchive.chadwyck.com.library.lausys.georgetown.edu/>.

military can force the millions of newly sensitized Iranians to return to work willingly for the glory of the badly tarnished Pahlavi regime.⁷⁰

A week later, Ambassador Sullivan sent his “thinking the unthinkable” telegram about the possibility of a collapsed Iran government. In response, Vance’s State Department advisors evaluated how to address a range of possibilities, from the Shah remaining as a figurehead in a parliamentary democracy, to a military junta with the Shah as a figurehead, to a military coup without the Shah, to a completely collapsed Iran in civil war.⁷¹

During November 1978, Vance was alarmed that Brzezinski was applying intense pressure to “encourage the Shah to use the army to smash the opposition.”⁷² Indeed, Brzezinski was engaged in numerous conversations with Ambassador Zahedi to communicate to the Shah “our strong support and the need for the Shah to display firm determination,” that is the “Iron Fist.”⁷³ Vance, on the other hand, had determined from the analyses presented by colleagues that it still might be possible to help the Shah construct a new civilian government. Moreover, he was confident that a military

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 329.

⁷² Ibid., 330.

⁷³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 371.

solution, based upon reliance on an army that was more than 50 percent conscript, would fail miserably.⁷⁴

In mid December 1978, the SCC again met, this time to hear George Ball, former undersecretary of state, who had undertaken an extensive review of the situation in Iran, offer his observations and recommendations. Significantly, Brzezinski had not only attempted to block input to the Ball report from officials recommended by the Department of State, but he also attempted to block the distribution of Ball's background memorandum prepared for the president.⁷⁵ The president, however, allowed the distribution to the SCC members and others.⁷⁶ Ball's message was as dire as Sullivan's message in November: the Shah's regime was "on the verge of collapse."⁷⁷ Ball recommended that "we must deal with the realities of the Shah's precarious power position and help him face it. We must make clear that, in our view, his only chance to save his dynasty (if indeed that is still possible) and retain our support is for him to transfer his power to a government responsive to the people."⁷⁸ Ball bluntly stated that the United States could no longer "express our unqualified

⁷⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 329-330.

⁷⁵ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 252.

⁷⁶ Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 460.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 458.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

support for the Shah.”⁷⁹ He also discussed the complexities of a possible military solution, and concluded that if the Shah turned “his army against the people,” it would disintegrate.⁸⁰ Ball’s recommended solution was that the Shah should appoint a Council of Notables to represent all elements of Iranian society. The Council would not be a government itself, but would have a mandate to create a government. Ball contended that such a new government would have the credibility to block the return of Khomeini and even to allow the Shah to retain his commander-in-chief role of the armed forces.⁸¹

During the SCC meeting, both Brown and Brzezinski strongly opposed Ball’s recommendations (which were supported by Vance), and urged Carter not to adopt the recommendations. Carter sided with Brown and Brzezinski because he felt the need to conduct further assessments of the Shah’s status and attitude.⁸² Then, the president revealed that he intended to send Brzezinski to Teheran to which an extraordinarily surprised Ball responded: “With all due respect,” that is “the worst idea I ever heard.” Ball explained that a Brzezinski visit would “heighten and sharpen the anti-American

⁷⁹ Ibid, 459.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Vance, *Hard Choices*, 330.

fury and you will be held responsible.”⁸³ Carter did not ultimately embrace Ball’s position, nor did he send Brzezinski to Iran. At a minimum, the Ball report had prevented the immediate execution of the “Iron Fist.”

By the end of December, the Shah’s position had deteriorated further. Ambassador Sullivan notified Vance that the Shah wanted to know whether the United States would support him in a policy of brutal repression. Concerned the United States should never support a policy of brutal repression for many reasons, Vance prepared a cable with instructions for Ambassador Sullivan that stated: “tell the Shah unequivocally that the United States would not support the iron fist option and that we believe he must move swiftly to establish a new civilian government.”⁸⁴ Vance argued that “it was important that we not be identified with an almost certainly unsuccessful action, and that we attempt to dissuade the Shah from destroying the army in a vain effort to save his throne.”⁸⁵ He wanted to authorize Sullivan to hold discussions with officials in the government, the opposition, and the military and to advocate for the “establishment of a civilian government with firm military support that would restore

⁸³ Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 461.

⁸⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 332.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

order and guide Iran from autocracy to whatever new regime the Iranian people themselves decided upon, whether constitutional monarchy or Islamic republic.”⁸⁶

On December 28, Vance, Brown, Turner, Schlesinger, and Aaron met to discuss the draft cable. As Vance noted, “there was no support for my draft cable.”⁸⁷ Instead, Brzezinski drafted instructions that gained the general support of the group, which stated that the United States continued to prefer a moderate civilian government, “but, if there is uncertainty either about the underlying orientation of such a government or its capacity to govern, or if the Army is in danger of becoming more fragmented, then a firm military government under the Shah may be unavoidable.” Brzezinski continued that if the Shah believed these alternatives were not feasible, he should consider establishing a regency council that would supervise a military government.⁸⁸

Interestingly, as Brzezinski recounted the history of this meeting, he failed to acknowledge that the language that was ultimately sent to Sullivan was not his language as approved by the group. Indeed, Vance was so disturbed by the tone and content of the cable that he went alone to Camp David that afternoon, talked to Carter about the dangers implicit in the cable, and persuaded Carter that there were dangers associated with “the Shah’s continuing flirtation with the iron fist,” and that it was likely that the

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 332-333.

Shah's presence in Iran would prevent any understanding between the opposition and the military leaders."⁸⁹ Agreeing with Vance's arguments, Carter and he worked out new language that stated:

...but, if there is uncertainty either about the underlying orientation of such a government or its capacity to govern, or if the Army is in danger of becoming more fragmented, 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 believes these alternatives to be infeasible, then a regency council supervising the military government might be considered by him.⁹⁰

Vance was pleased with Carter's decision and his reversal, at least temporary reversal, of the commitment to the "Iron Fist." As he noted, "The Shah could not fail to see from this message that we would support a military government only to end bloodshed, but not to apply the iron fist to retain the throne."⁹¹ Thus, Vance won this round of the "Iron Fist" policy battle, but not completely and certainly not forever.

In some ways, the Shah's next actions made Vance's temporary victory over the "Iron Fist" meaningless. On January 2, 1979, the Shah announced to Ambassador Sullivan that he recognized that the "Iron Fist" would not work, that when it came down to it, he could not order a blood bath, that he had decided to ask Shapour Bakhtiar, a leader of the National Front to appoint a new government, and that he would agree to

⁸⁹ Ibid., 332.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 333.

⁹¹ Ibid.

leave the country temporarily.⁹² The next day, Vance received a telegram from Sullivan that expressed Sullivan's concerns that the Shah might still use the military option at the behest of a group of military officers and that if the Shah decided against it, a military coup might occur. At a January 4 meeting, Carter and his advisors prepared new instructions for Ambassador Sullivan to authorize him to tell the Shah the United States supported: first, the establishment of a civilian government under Bakhtiar; second, the Shah's efforts to preserve the independence and stability of Iran; and finally, the Shah's decision to leave Iran under a regency council. Moreover, Carter assured the Shah that he was welcome in the United States, and that he was committed to the military leadership in Iran being united and in control of the armed forces.⁹³ Vance followed up the instructions to Sullivan with another cable that emphasized that "Iranian military unity had become absolutely vital," but also stipulated that the purpose of military contingency plans should be to "restore order," that is, not to engage in or countenance bloodshed.⁹⁴

During the next few days, Vance and Brzezinski made proposals to Carter that illuminated their substantive differences about strategies for dealing with the crisis and the merits of the "Iron Fist." Carter's responses to these proposals, both negative,

⁹² Ibid., 335.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

indicated that he was not certain about whose views to embrace. Referring to evidence that Khomeini would support maintaining a secular Iranian government while he guided a fundamentalist religious revolution, Vance proposed that he be authorized to open “a direct channel to Khomeini” in Paris. Carter rejected the recommendation because “forming any relationship with Khomeini would indicate a lack of support for the struggling new government in Iran, which the Ayatollah had sworn to support.”⁹⁵ Carter did, however, authorize the French president to make a connection. On January 10, Ambassador Sullivan sent a cable to Vance that castigated Carter for relying on the French to make the Khomeini connection. In response, Carter asked Vance to remove Sullivan for his loss of control and insolence, but Vance persuaded him that a new person would not be effective in the crisis. Carter then said he would rely for eyewitness advice from U.S. General Robert Huyser, the official that Defense Secretary Brown had sent to Iran primarily to get more accurate assessments of the strength of the Iranian military and to persuade the military to maintain stability in the country, even if the Shah left.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 454.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 451-452.

The “Iron Fist” and a Coup

On January 10, 1979, Brzezinski proposed that if Bakhtiar did not obtain credible support from other political leaders within 10 days, the United States should move to a military coup – a transmutation of the Iron Fist from a military option undertaken by the Shah to a military option undertaken by the United States. Carter rejected this recommendation.⁹⁷ On January 12, Brzezinski wrote to the President again with the intention of making him more amenable to a coup. Brzezinski charged that certain officials in the State Department, the Defense Department, the Joint Chiefs, the CIA, and the NSA were engaging in “dangerous self-delusion” by believing that once the Shah leaves the country and Khomeini returns and agrees to a role of “establishing the general parameters of political action, but not involving himself in the details,” that “all will be well.”⁹⁸ Brzezinski argued again that “we may soon see a situation in which we may have to throw our weight behind one of the sides in order to protect our interests.” Carter responded testily to Brzezinski’s analysis: “Zbig -- After we make joint decisions deploring them for the record doesn’t help me.”⁹⁹ Brzezinski stated that in his advocacy for a coup at this point, he “felt very much alone” and that he

⁹⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 381.

⁹⁸ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "NSC Weekly Report #84," *Declassified Documents Reference System*, January 12, 1979, <http://0-galenet.galegroup.com.library.lausys.georgetown.edu/servlet/DDRS?locID=wash43584>.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 382.

“suspected that my urging of a coup -- for broader strategic concerns -- was undermining my credibility with the President, who found my advocacy of a coup morally troublesome (as well as irritating).”¹⁰⁰ In an effort to get Carter to agree to a proactive coup, Brzezinski continued to brief Carter about General Huyser’s assessments of the potential problems associated with a series of failing governments in Iran followed by a coup.

Brzezinski, therefore, persisted in his advocacy for the “Iron Fist.” For example, after the Shah left Iran on January 16 until the end of February, Brzezinski, using reports from General Huyser about the promising unity at the top of the Iranian military structure, attempted to strengthen his arguments for a coup, even though the State Department and his own aide Gary Sick documented the fragile state of the Iranian military.¹⁰¹ Likewise, Defense Secretary Brown conveyed messages to General Huyser in Iran that were consistent with Brzezinski’s views: “it remained very important that we not imply to the military that there would never be a basis for strong military action, or that any civilian government would be better than a military coup. I repeated that he needed to walk a narrow line to prevent a military coup against the Bakhtiar government, but not encourage the military to stand idly by if the situation deteriorated

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Sick, *All Fall Down*, 165.

continuously.”¹⁰² After receiving these instructions, Huyser kept Brown updated about the military’s planning for action.

By late January 1979, the feasibility of a military action appeared doubtful. Huyser reported that the military was worried about the impact of Khomeini’s return on the Bakhtiar government, and that the moment for a military move would be at the time of Khomeini’s return. At a February 5 meeting, Brzezinski asked “Huyser for a direct answer to the question of whether the military would and could execute a coup if given a signal from Washington, and Huyser responded in the affirmative.”¹⁰³ Brzezinski then drafted a long, private memo to Carter which stated that he was “not arguing for an immediate decision to stage a coup, but that I felt that within the next two weeks we would have to make a deliberate choice to that effect.”¹⁰⁴ The President did not respond to the memo other than to say it was sensitive.

Nevertheless, by January 19, it appeared that Brzezinski had finally won over the President to the “Iron Fist.” At a breakfast meeting with the Vice President and his top foreign policy aides, Carter announced: “We should tell Bakhtiar that we will not accommodate any more to the left; we support the military in their position and in their effort to maintain stability, but we are not in favor of bringing Khomeini and his people

¹⁰² Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 384.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 386.

into the government.”¹⁰⁵ Vance and Mondale asked about whether the United States would no longer support expanding the political base as a solution to which Carter responded that the only factions left in Iran that clearly supported the U.S. position were the military and a few former Shah supporters. When Vance expressed caution that this would mean that the U.S. was encouraging a coup, Carter responded: “We never agreed among ourselves to a coalition government. Yet all people hear abroad is the implication that we favor a coalition government. We will back the military in their support of Bakhtiar, but we don’t want it to slide any further to the left. The threat of a military coup is the best way to prevent Khomeini from sliding into power.”¹⁰⁶ So, the president had now moved from a nebulous position to a position of supporting the *threat* of the “Iron Fist.”

On January 23 and 24, during meetings with advisors, Carter appeared to embrace the “Iron Fist,” withdraw support from it, and then gingerly embrace it again. Bakhtiar had notified Secretary Brown that he would arrest Khomeini when Khomeini attempted to return to Iran, and that he would use the military to carry out the decision. Carter was pleased, but changed his mind about supporting these plans when Vance forecast that massive bloody disorders, Khomeini’s likely death, and more massive disorders would be the likely consequence of this action. Having indicated he would

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 387.

not encourage Bakhtiar to do this, Carter then agreed to instructions favored by Brzezinski and Brown that gave “Bakhtiar the green light to do what he proposed.”¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, no action took place because Khomeini delayed his return.

By the end of February, Khomeini had returned to Iran, two governments were jockeying for power, and the Iranian military was disintegrating. To Carter’s great displeasure and dismay, lower level State Department officials acknowledged that no one expected the Bakhtiar government to survive. On February 11, 1979, Brzezinski called an SCC meeting to review the critical situation in Iran. Once again, the viability of a coup was raised. Warren Christopher, Department of Defense officials, and General Huyser all indicated that a military solution was not viable.¹⁰⁸ By February 20, Brzezinski terminated his pursuit of the “Iron Fist” policy because there was no realistic way of executing it. He wrote in his journal: “A depressing story of chaos and confusion. The more I hear of what is going on, the more depressed I am over the fact that I did not succeed in getting the U.S. government to approve and, if necessary, to initiate an Iranian military coup.”¹⁰⁹

Just because the “Iron Fist” was not implemented did not signify that Vance had won the battle of the “Iron Fist.” In fact, Vance lost far more than he gained. At key

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 388.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 390-391.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 393.

points during the process, his arguments with Carter about the implications of the United States supporting a bloody military action or a coup were clearly compelling, and dissuaded Carter from making an immediate, firm decision to support the “Iron Fist.” Nevertheless, had the meetings in February 1979 produced evidence that the military could have undertaken a successful action, it is likely that Carter would have supported this.

Vance therefore learned many things from the debate over the “Iron Fist.” He learned that Brzezinski believed that his view of the political and strategic benefits of a coup would ultimately outweigh the grave moral issues of this decision. He learned that Brzezinski would relentlessly push to have Carter embrace his views -- views that Vance considered unwise and dangerous. Finally, he learned that Carter, who had adamantly adopted a “no coup” policy early on in the decisionmaking process as a matter of principle and policy, would not consistently hold to his views when challenged with difficult circumstances. For Vance this meant that he had to be on guard at all times because he did not agree with Brzezinski’s views on major strategic issues, and he knew he did not have Carter’s total confidence. To be on guard at all times was debilitating, frustrating, and discouraging.¹¹⁰ When Vance was faced with

¹¹⁰ Mrs. Vance emphasized how discouraging Vance’s interactions with Brzezinski were during the Iranian crisis. In Grace Sloane Vance, interview by author, April 10, 2001.

arguing against a military action to rescue the hostages captured by Iranian students on November 4, 1979, he could look back to Carter's approach to the Iranian revolution and know that he should not be confident about Carter acting according to his stated beliefs and principles.

Brzezinski's Assault on Vance's Authority

The history of the Carter administration's policymaking during the initial phases of the Iranian Revolution is replete with examples of Brzezinski's deliberate undermining of Vance's authority and influence. And what was particularly alarming was that Carter either knew about these actions, or chose not to know about them, or approved of them but never told Vance that he had decided on a different, expanded role for Brzezinski. What was clear was that Carter was not open about how he portrayed his policy decisions and whose advice he found more compelling. Although the brief examination of the consideration of "Iron Fist" policies above documented that Carter often disagreed with Brzezinski about his recommendations concerning Iran, Carter stated: "There had not been any differences between my position and that of the National Security Council staff or the Defense Department," and noted that he hardly knew "the desk officers and others in State, but work very closely with the NSC people."¹¹¹ Given that Carter had daily contact with Vance and worked closely with

¹¹¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*. 458.

Warren Christopher, Harold Saunders, David Newsom, and others, it was a disingenuous but revealing statement.

One of Brzezinski's most egregious behaviors was the maintenance of back channel contacts with Ambassador Zahedi during the early phases of the Revolution during which he encouraged the Shah's employment of the "Iron Fist." Although Brzezinski maintained that Carter told him to maintain the Zahedi connection, it was not clear that Carter intended Brzezinski to be other than a listening post. Brzezinski was anything but a listening post. Indeed, during George Ball's assessment of the Iranian crisis that he performed at Carter's request, Ball discovered that "Brzezinski was systematically excluding the State Department from the shaping or conduct of our Iranian policy."¹¹² Ball charged that Brzezinski attempted to keep him away from the State Department's Iranian desk officer, and that he was ignoring input from William H. Sullivan, the U.S. ambassador to Iran."¹¹³ Ball stressed that it was even more alarming that Brzezinski was having phone conversations with Ardeshir Zahedi, Iranian ambassador to the United States and the Shah's former son-in-law, because Zahedi was capable of providing "dangerously slanted" advice.¹¹⁴ Sharing his observations with Vance, Ball emphasized that Brzezinski was "doing everything possible to exclude the

¹¹² Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 458.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

State Department from participation in, or even knowledge of, our developing relations with Iran, communicating directly with Zahedi to the exclusion of our embassy, and using so-called back channel (CIA channel) telegrams of which the State Department was unaware.”¹¹⁵

Vance was furious. He immediately confronted Brzezinski: “I told him that I had heard from an impeccable source that he was communicating directly with the Iranians and that this was intolerable. He denied the accusation.”¹¹⁶ Vance then asked for a meeting with Carter and Brzezinski during which Brzezinski again denied the accusations. At this point Carter asked for copies of the White House communications with Iran. Vance stated: “That was the last I heard of the matter, but the back-channel communications stopped. This was, to say the least, a painful experience.”¹¹⁷

One question that arises from this incident is why did Carter permit Brzezinski to remain as NSC advisor after receiving incontrovertible evidence that Brzezinski was not behaving professionally? The fact that Carter did not appear to comprehend that the NSC/State situation was intolerable and restrict Brzezinski’s activities to that of a coordinator, internal analyst, and counselor after Brzezinski had clearly undermined U.S. policy indicated that it was highly unlikely that Vance could ever function properly

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 328.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

and effectively as secretary of state in the Carter administration as long as Brzezinski was the national security advisor.

A final incident that exposed serious flaws in Carter's leadership and the vulnerability of the State Department was the dressing down he gave to Vance and State Department officials on February 5, 1979. Carter was rightly furious about leaked news reports that described not only the rift between State Department and NSC officials about Iranian policy, but also the State Department's doubts about the fate of Iranian Prime Minister's Bakhtiar. After State Department spokesman Tom Reston declined to state a specific position on Bakhtiar, White House spokesman Jody Powell denied that President Carter had concluded that "Bakhtiar's government could not surmount the political challenges it faces."¹¹⁸

Carter's response to one State Department official's leaked assessment about Bakhtiar was to direct his full fury at State Department officials for this transgression and to ignore the multiple times that Brzezinski and his staff were guilty of media backgrounding in support of their position during his administration. Indeed, Carter maintained that he met with NSC staffers after this incident only to "balance the slate," because he did not find them guilty of any leak wrongdoing on Iran whatsoever.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Jim Hoagland, "U.S. Wary on Survival of Bakhtiar's Government," *The Washington Post*, February 6, 1979, sec. A, p. 10.

¹¹⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 458.

Carter emphasized that he “laid down the law” to the State Department officials to stem the steady stream of negative stories about his Iranian policymaking that had obviously been leaked by State Department officials opposed to his policies. He further emphasized that “if there was another outbreak of misinformation, distortions, or self-serving news leaks, I would direct the Secretary of State to discharge the officials responsible for that particular desk, even if some innocent people might get punished.”¹²⁰ Giving no one an opportunity to respond to criticism that impugned the group’s honor, Carter then left the room abruptly.

The news media carried fairly extensive coverage of the meeting, with reports focusing on the fact that the president’s anger against leaks had been directed at the Department of State. The *New York Times* reported that Carter had told State Department officials “to keep their criticisms to themselves or resign”¹²¹ The *Washington Post* coverage portrayed the president and Brzezinski as a team -- a team that was “angry and concerned about disclosures of bitter policy disputes between the White House and State Department” over a number of issues. Significantly, this article concluded that the meeting represented “a strengthening of Brzezinski’s position in defining the limits of public discussion” -- an astounding assertion given that the

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Terence Smith, "Carter Criticizing Aides Statements," *The New York Times*, February 9, 1979, sec. A, p. 32.

greatest leaker and self promoter in the Carter administration was Zbigniew Brzezinski.¹²²

Extremely distressed by the President's tone and threats as well as the unfairness of his focus on the State Department as the source of most administration leaks, Vance nevertheless directed his staff to stop any leaking that was taking place. Henry Precht, the staffer who was probably doing some leaking, noted that State Department officials, such as Leslie Gelb and Anthony Lake, bristled at Carter's treatment, especially since one person was probably responsible for the leak in question, and Brzezinski and the NSC were far guiltier of leaking than the State Department.¹²³ Harold Saunders also stressed that State Department staffers deeply resented Carter's treatment and suspected that Brzezinski was the driving force behind Carter's approach.¹²⁴ At any rate, these assaults on Vance's authority and the Department of State's credibility underscored that the Carter-Vance relationship had deteriorated substantially and that Carter would not take any meaningful actions to control Brzezinski.

Vance's policymaking experiences with challenging the "Iron Fist" and his efforts to confront Brzezinski with evidence about his inappropriate back channel

¹²² Jim Hoagland, "Carter Orders State Department to Contain Policy Disputes," *The Washington Post*, February 8, 1979, sec. A, p. 1.

¹²³ Henry Precht, "The Iranian Revolution: An Oral History with Henry Precht," interview by Charles Stuart Kennedy. *Frontline Diplomacy: The U.S. Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection* (Winter 2004), CD-ROM.

¹²⁴ Harold Saunders, Interview by Author, January 22, 2002.

contacts produced a stalemate of sorts. On the one hand, Vance had several times prevented Brzezinski from implementing the “Iron Fist,” and also made it more difficult for Brzezinski to have unmonitored contact with foreign officials. On the other hand, Vance had witnessed Carter wavering about authorizing a military intervention in a crisis in which he believed that a military intervention would not have worked, would have been counterproductive, and would have violated Carter’s own principles. And, significantly, he had experienced Carter abusing his staff for undermining administration policy, when the NSC staff was even more responsible for leaking information about the contentious policymaking system. The policymaking process of the Iranian Revolution clarified that Vance was not Carter’s primary foreign policy aide and spokesman. Moreover, it called into serious question whether or not Carter would adhere to his stated foreign policy principles. Thus, even before Carter, Vance, and Brzezinski were challenged by extremist Iranian students attacking the U.S Embassy in Tehran and then taking sixty-one American hostages on November 4, 1979, the underpinnings of Vance’s resignation had been almost full formed. The confrontations about the Iranian Revolution had fundamentally weakened the Carter-Vance relationship.

CHAPTER 8. AFGHANISTAN -- A FINAL ASSAULT

The Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 created insurmountable challenges for Cyrus Vance. Vance's description of the intervention as "a turning point in U.S.-Soviet relations" was echoed by other U.S. policymakers, Kremlinologists, and media observers who proclaimed it the "end of the Era of Détente."¹ Even though it still made sense to pursue arms control with the Soviet Union, how could Vance make a politically persuasive argument to ratify the SALT agreement after the Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan and created such a critical regional security crisis? As Douglas Brinkley pointed out in a retrospective after Vance's death in 2002, "More than anything else, it was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan...that served as a harbinger of things to come and doomed Vance's survival in the Carter administration."²

Even though Afghanistan had not been historically defined as a country in the United States' strategic orbit, after the Soviet intervention, the administration defined it as such. In fact, in a *Meet the Press* interview in January 1980, Carter hyperbolically

¹ Robert G. Kaiser, "Afghanistan: End of the Era of Detente," *The New York Times*, January 17, 1980, sec. A, p. 1.

² Douglas Brinkley, "Out of the Loop. The Day the Secretary of State Called It Quits," *The New York Times*, December 29, 2002, sec. E, p. 43.

stated that the Soviet invasion was “the most serious threat to world peace since the Second World War.”³ Commenting on the “grave challenge” posed by the Soviet intervention, Brzezinski observed just before the invasion:

...we are now facing a regional crisis. Both Iran and Afghanistan are in turmoil, and Pakistan is both unstable internally and extremely apprehensive externally. If the Soviets succeed in Afghanistan, and if Pakistan acquiesces, the age-long dream of Moscow to have a direct access to the Indian Ocean will have been fulfilled.⁴

After the invasion, Brzezinski characterized Soviet actions as “serious for our security and vital interests as Soviet actions in Greece in 1947.”⁵ Vance also believed that “Afghanistan and the continuing disorder in Iran were threatening the Persian Gulf security system.”⁶ In an address to the Council of Foreign Relations on March 3, 1980,

³ Jimmy Carter, “Meet the Press Interview with Bill Monroe, Carl T. Rowan, David Broder, and Judy Woodruff, January 20, 1980,” *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php/pid=33060>.

⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Memorandum for the President. Reflections on Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan, December 26, 1979,” *The National Security Archive*, http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com/cgi=bin cqcgi?CQ_Session_Key.

⁵ Brzezinski’s reference to Greece was misleading. The statement implied that the Soviet Union sent troops to Greece, which was not true. Also, not all policymakers shared Brzezinski’s view that the strategic importance of Greece to the United States was identical to the strategic importance of Afghanistan. See, Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Minutes. Special Coordination Committee Meeting, January 14, 1980,” *Declassified Documents Reference System*, <http://www.ddrs.psmmedia.com/tplweb-cgi/f...+409245>.

⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 386.

he highlighted the U.S.'s vital interests in the region, albeit in more subdued tones than the ones employed by Carter and Brzezinski:

What is at stake first in Afghanistan is the freedom of a nation and of a people. We are concerned as well with the broader threat that Soviet actions pose to the region of southwest Asia and the Persian Gulf...it is entirely accurate to say that the vital interests of the United States – in fact, of much of the world – are involved in this region. An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region would be an assault on these vital interests.⁷

Although Brzezinski and Vance both perceived the Soviet actions in Afghanistan as threatening to U.S. strategic interests, they disagreed about the precise nature of the threat -- a disagreement stemming from different views about the nature of Soviet power and their perceptions of the Soviet Union's motives. They also differed about how to proceed with the U.S.-Soviet relationship and the critical nature of a future arms control agreement. Vance, however, was not in a position to win policy battles with Brzezinski. As described in the preceding three chapters, Vance's influence was already weakened by assaults on his policies and authority. In addition, just prior to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Vance had also been accused of mismanaging what David Newsom referred to as "the bizarre episode of the Soviet brigade in Cuba" – an episode that "had an impact out of proportion to the circumstances."⁸ From March

⁷ Cyrus Vance, "Afghanistan: America's Course, an Address before the Council on Foreign Relations, March 3, 1980," *Department of State Bulletin* (April 1980): 12.

⁸ David D. Newsom, *The Soviet Brigade in Cuba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), xv.

1979 through October 1979, the administration had grappled with the issue of whether a recently discovered Soviet brigade in Cuba was indeed a “successor to similar units that stayed in Cuba after 1962,” or whether it was a new, aggressive move on the part of the Soviets.⁹ Not only did the discovery of the brigade necessitate that Vance counter Brzezinski’s undocumented and incorrect belief that the brigade was another sign of Soviet world-wide aggression, but he also had to attempt to persuade Congress, particularly those individuals locked in election battles, that the brigade posed no new threat that should undermine SALT II. The brigade episode resulted in Vance attempting to seek changes and assurances regarding the brigade’s presence with the Soviet Union, “not to resolve a problem through seeking an explanation, but to resolve, through diplomacy with the Soviet Union an American domestic issue.”¹⁰

Just two months after dousing the flames associated with the Soviet brigade, Vance now had to contend with a truly formidable crisis. Deploring the Soviet invasion, he still believed in working with the Soviet Union in areas that benefited the long-term interests of the United States. But after the Soviet invasion, no one wanted to

⁹ It was not an act of Soviet aggression. Newsom documented that in October 1979, former Kennedy staffers and cabinet officials stated that Kennedy had agreed in "1963 that a Soviet brigade at exactly the same location could remain in Cuba." See Newsom, *The Soviet Brigade in Cuba*, 49.

¹⁰ Ibid., 58.

hear Vance's arguments for arms control, and he no longer had the clout to make people listen.

The Historical Context

The nature of Afghanistan's politics and traditions in the mid 1970s reflected its turbulent history as a "buffer between the Russian and British empires," -- "the Great Game" in which the Russians and the British acted "to fend off expansion by the other as much as to expand its own rule."¹¹ Bordered by the Soviet Union, Pakistan, and China, Afghanistan became a pawn in the expansionist goals of the British Empire and czarist Russia in the nineteenth century. Afghanistan did not have firmly established boundaries until the beginning of the twentieth century. By 1919, both Britain and Russia recognized its independence, but continued to influence and meddle in political and economic development, including the occasional intervention to establish a preferred leader on the throne. In 1926, the Soviet Union and Afghanistan entered into a Non-Aggression Treaty. The United States recognized the Afghan government only in 1934 and established formal diplomatic ties after 1942.¹²

During the post World War II period, Afghanistan periodically sought relationships with both the Soviet Union and the United States. From 1946 to 1955, the

¹¹ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 977.

¹² Ibid., 979.

government attempted to develop an economic, political and military relationship with the United States because leaders believed that the United States would act as a “disinterested” counterweight to the Soviet Union.¹³ However, Afghan perceptions of its relative power in the region changed when Great Britain withdrew from the subcontinent and Pakistan became a state in 1947. With the Durand Line, a boundary established by Britain in 1893 but never accepted by the Afghans, now established as its boundary, the Afghan government bristled about boundary issues and the fact that Pakistan now included ethnic Pushtan tribes east of the Durand Line.¹⁴ Afghan leaders believed that their strategic interests had been threatened. When it became clear that the U.S. government would not provide the same level of support to Afghanistan that it did to Pakistan, Afghanistan applied to the Soviet Union for assistance, which it enthusiastically granted.¹⁵

From 1953 to 1963, Prime Minister Sardar Mohammad Daoud sought economic and military support from both the United States and the Soviet Union, and thus maintained a non-allied position during the early Cold War. Dismissed in 1963 for a variety of controversial political and social policies, Daoud waited to seize power again. Mohammad Zahir Shah came to the throne in 1964, and engaged in “an experiment

¹³ Ibid., 981.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

with democracy” that allowed the growth of extremist parties, including the communist People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), which maintained a close relationship with the Soviet Union. The PDPA split into factions that reflected “ideological and tribal lines,” with one faction more radical and the other “closer to Moscow” and “operating within the local political hierarchy.”¹⁶

Poor economic conditions and charges of corruption against the Afghan royal family provided Daoud with the chance to reassume power via a military coup in 1973. From 1973 until 1978, Daoud ruled Afghanistan as prime minister and president, but was unsuccessful in implementing needed social, economic and political reforms. Although he looked to the Soviet Union’s experience as a model for his modernization efforts, he was “flexible (and needy) enough to receive aid” from both the United States and the Soviet Union.¹⁷ Dobrynin pointed out that the United Nations and the Western aid organizations ran assistance projects to the south of Kabul, while the Soviet specialists focused on the northern areas.¹⁸ As Westad has explained, Daoud was a “modernizer” who wanted to “develop agriculture, build communications, and establish a centralized state.”¹⁹ By 1977, however, Daoud was in serious political trouble, both

¹⁶ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 434-435.

¹⁷ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 300.

¹⁸ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 435.

¹⁹ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 299.

for attempting to do too much and for attempting to do too little. He was “criticized by technocrats in his own government,” and “by local power holders, including the clergy, for attempting to overturn ethnic and religious customs.”²⁰ In spite of the instability, including Daoud’s purges against urban-based Communists that Daoud considered a threat to his regime, U.S. Ambassador Adolph Dubs cabled the State Department in March 1978 that “President Daoud remains very much in control and faces no significant opposition.”²¹ Dubs’ information was wholly inaccurate. The Afghan Community Party (a reunified PDPA) took advantage of the weakened conditions in the country, initiated a bloody coup in April 1978, overthrew Daoud, and murdered him and his family. Interestingly, Soviet officials, who applauded the PDPA’s involvement in Afghan politics, had advised the Communists to reach an accommodation with Daoud. Thus, the April coup was a surprise to the Soviet diplomats in Kabul.²²

As Dobrynin described it, the coup was followed by a “period of rapidly escalating instability.”²³ The PDPA established a brutal regime, a Marxist program that conflicted with “deeply rooted Afghan traditions,” and immediately encountered strong opposition. Not only did the PDPA experience internal conflicts that resulted in

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 219.

²² Westad. *The Global Cold War*, 302.

²³ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 435,

executions, purges, and imprisonments, but “thousands of members of the traditional elite, the religious establishment, and the intelligentsia were imprisoned, tortured, or murdered.”²⁴ Dobrynin maintained that the Soviet Union considered sending troops to Afghanistan in March 1979 after Afghanistan’s new president, Nur Mohammed Taraki, appealed for help to quell an armed rebellion, but the “Politburo believed that such a move would wreck the preparations for the Brezhnev-Carter summit.”²⁵

The U.S. policy after April 1978 was to continue diplomatic relations with Afghanistan and to encourage the Shah of Iran to do likewise. Under Secretary of State Newsom, after an investigative trip to Afghanistan in July 1978, reported accurately about the character of the Marxist regime, and advocated retaining a program of limited aid. This “reflected a belief in the State Department that no strategic threat was present in Afghanistan’s move to the political left,” and that it was imperative to conclude the SALT agreement with the Soviets, which was in the U.S.’s strategic interests.²⁶

“Formalizing and enlarging the Soviet commitment to support the new government,” the Soviet Union signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation with Afghanistan in December 1978 and increased its military assistance significantly.²⁷

²⁴ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 302.

²⁵ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 435.

²⁶ Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 220.

²⁷ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 996.

Without the support of the Soviet Union, the regime, which was under attack by a countrywide insurgency after the summer of 1978, would not have survived. In February 1979, an unidentified gunman captured American Ambassador Dubs, who was then killed during a police rescue attempt, a rescue effort that included the presence of a Soviet advisor.²⁸ In response, the United States cut its aid program and delayed appointing a new ambassador.²⁹ Dobrynin noted that “Moscow expressed deep regret over the tragedy,” and denied any responsibility for the Afghan police action. He also admitted that the Soviet investigation into the assassination confirmed that Soviet advisors had failed to control the Afghan police, who were attempting to free Dubs, properly.”³⁰ In addition, Dobrynin observed that the Soviet Union was extremely concerned about the tensions in Afghanistan, and responded by increasing military, political and economic assistance during the remainder of 1979.³¹

The April 1978 coup in Afghanistan that led to a pro-Soviet, Marxist regime did not provoke a vigorous U.S. policy debate, because as Vance later pointed out, “We had no evidence of Soviet complicity in the coup.”³² The U.S. policy continued to be: “to

²⁸ Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 1048.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 436.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 1047-1048.

support Afghanistan's efforts to preserve the largest possible degree of independence from Soviet pressures."³³

During the spring and summer of 1979, however, Brzezinski and Vance reengaged in a debate about the nature of Soviet power and U.S. strategic interests. Brzezinski pressed Carter "for a more vigorous reaction" to the growing Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, and criticized the State Department for its reluctant compliance.³⁴ In March, Brzezinski told CIA Director Stansfield Turner to develop intelligence about the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. In May, he wrote to Carter to impress upon him that if the Soviet Union dominated Afghanistan, the Soviets would then be in a position to "promote a separate Baluchistan, which would give them access to the Indian Ocean while dismembering Pakistan and Iran."³⁵ He then drew parallels between the Afghan situation and "Molotov's proposal to Hitler in late 1940 that the Nazis recognize the Soviet claim to preeminence in the region south of Batum and Baku."³⁶ With Carter's agreement, the NSC began to prepare "contingency plans for an American response to a Soviet invasion."³⁷ In addition, in September, Brzezinski wrote

³³ Ibid., 1046.

³⁴ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 429.

³⁵ Ibid., 427.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 427.

a five-page essay for Carter that explained the “increasingly pervasive feeling in the United States and abroad that, in the U.S.-Soviet relationship, the Soviets were becoming more assertive and the United States more acquiescent.”³⁸ Brzezinski also attacked the State Department’s “inaction or opposition,” because it “diluted some of the President’s decisions designed to demonstrate American firmness.”³⁹

Consistent with its anti-“Iron Fist” arguments concerning Iran, the State Department argued against supporting an anti-communist coup, and instead began to consult with allies about its Afghan intelligence and to start preparing a “concerted political response to tightening Soviet control over Kabul.”⁴⁰ In October, it initiated an “extensive round of consultations with our allies and key regional and non-aligned governments,” and asked the governments “to voice concerns publicly and to the Soviets.”⁴¹ By October, Vance noted that “the question was not whether the Soviets would become more actively engaged in the Afghan civil war, but what form their larger involvement would take.”⁴² Vance also pointed out that most intelligence

³⁸ Ibid., 428.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Vance, *Tough Choices*, 387.

⁴¹ Peter Tarnoff, "Growing Soviet Involvement in Afghanistan, October 11, 1979," *Declassified Documents Reference System*, <http://0-galenet.galegroup.com.library.lausys.georgetown.edu/servlet/DDRS?tx1=afghanistan&sl1=>.

⁴² Vance, *Hard Choices*, 387.

indicated that the Soviet Union would not commit its own combat troops. Vance later revealed that the administration used Pakistani contacts to keep the Iranians apprised of the situation and to attempt to “convince them that the hostage crisis was diverting world attention from Soviet subjugation of a neighboring Moslem state.”⁴³

In September 1979, former Prime Afghan Minister Hafizullah Amin ousted Afghan President Taraki and began to move against elements of the PDPA. The Soviet Union, who suspected Amin of “tilting toward the United States,” was extremely concerned. Dobrynin described how a Soviet troika of Gromyko, KGB chief Andropov and Defense Minister Ustinov, persuaded Brezhnev that the unsettled situation in Afghanistan “seriously threatened the security of the southern borders of the Soviet Union,” and that the United States, China, or Iran could well attempt establishing an unfriendly regime in Afghanistan.⁴⁴ The Politburo approved the intervention decision on December 12. A Soviet invasion with airborne troops targeting Kabul and western Afghanistan began on December 24, 1979. On December 27, 700 KGB special units attacked Amin’s home and killed him, some family members, close aides. The next day, a KGB unit flew into Kabul, and helped to install Babrak Karmal, as prime minister and general secretary of the PDPA.⁴⁵ As Garthoff observed, “the line between

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 438.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

influencing events, and directly intervening to determine them, had been breached” by the Soviet Union.⁴⁶

Westad has described how the Soviet Union not only underestimated the international outcry of the invasion, but also “the extent of the U.S. response” and the ability of its Afghan regime to address the threats posed by Afghan Islamists.⁴⁷ Apparently, Brezhnev saw the intervention as a limited action, one that “would be over in a few weeks’ time.”⁴⁸ Brezhnev also anticipated that the intervention would help to produce internal stability in Afghanistan, and that once “real Communists” ran Kabul, the Soviet Union could minimize its role. Westad stressed that the “basic policy failure of the Soviet Afghan intervention was the belief that a foreign power could be used to secure the survival and ultimate success of a regime that demonstrably could not survive on its own.”⁴⁹

Perceptions of the Soviet Intervention

Why did the Soviet Union intervene in Afghanistan? Not surprisingly, Vance and Brzezinski had different opinions about the Soviets’ motivations. Acknowledging

⁴⁶ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 1054.

⁴⁷ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 325.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 324.

that he did not know for certain what motivated the Soviet Union, Vance believed that the Soviet Union had multiple reasons for its action. He suggested that its “immediate aim was to protect Soviet political interests in Afghanistan which they saw endangered.”⁵⁰ Vance noted that some Soviet officials leaders viewed Amin as a nationalist Communist “who did not listen to Soviet advice and was stumbling into a disaster.”⁵¹ They were concerned that a fundamentalist Islamic government would supplant Amin’s regime, and this would encourage the “spread of ‘Khomeini fever’ to other nations along Russia’s southern border.”⁵² Vance also suggested that certain Soviet leaders wanted an opportunity to position themselves “more favorably with respect to China and Pakistan.”⁵³ In addition, Vance offered another theory: the Soviets invaded because they had nothing to lose in their relationship with the United States. He clarified that he could not prove this, but he pointed out that the SALT Treaty was in even deeper trouble after the brigade episode, and that the current relationship with the United States offered the Soviet Union few trade and technology

⁵⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 388.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

benefits. Vance suggested that “it is possible that had there been more to lose in its relationship with the United States, the Soviet Union would have been more cautious.”⁵⁴

Brzezinski’s explanation for the Soviet intervention involved less nuance and more self congratulation: the invasion was a sign that he had always been correct about the nature of the Soviet Union and that it was a mistake not to link Soviet actions to U.S. willingness to negotiate on SALT. Furthermore, Brzezinski asserted that the invasion was a “vindication of my concern that the Soviets would be emboldened by our lack of response over Ethiopia.”⁵⁵ Writing in his journal in March 1980, Brzezinski reflected:

I have been reflecting on when did things begin genuinely to go wrong in the U.S.-Soviet relationship. My view is that it was on the day sometime in ...1978 when at the SCC meeting I advocated that we send in a carrier task force in reaction to the Soviet deployment of the Cubans in Ethiopia....The President backed the others rather than me, we did not react. Subsequently, the Soviets became more emboldened, we overreacted....That derailed SALT, the momentum of SALT was lost, and the final nail in the coffin was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 429.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 189.

Garthoff has also suggested that “Brzezinski saw Afghanistan as a more blatant Soviet move in a pattern of hard geopolitical competition, and welcomed its galvanizing effect in precipitating an American counterstrategy.”⁵⁷

A number of studies of the Soviet decision making process, including assessments by Soviet officials, have confirmed Vance’s observations about likely Soviet motives, and have suggested that “the American assessment of Soviet motivations was as flawed as the Soviet perception of danger.”⁵⁸ Westad has pointed out that NATO’s decision on December 12, 1979 to deploy 572 new American medium- and intermediate- range missiles (missiles that could strike inside the Soviet Union), as well as the increasing reluctance in the U.S. Senate to ratify the SALT II agreement, removed the concerns of some Politburo members over the effects a Soviet intervention may have on detente.”⁵⁹ Also examining the impact of the NATO decision, Garthoff has pointed out that even though NATO viewed this as “a successful political-military move by the alliance to meet a perceived political-military threat in Europe,” Soviet leaders interpreted this as “an unjustified escalation by the West of the arms competition and as a circumvention of the SALT II limitations.”⁶⁰ Dobrynin

⁵⁷ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 1068.

⁵⁸ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 336.

⁵⁹ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 318.

⁶⁰ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 817.

confirmed the damage of the NATO decision: “This reinforced Moscow’s hostility toward Carter and his administration because the Soviet leadership regarded it, first of all, as a deliberate departure from the strategic limits specified in the SALT II treaty.”⁶¹ Dobrynin also maintained that Vance was correct in his analysis about Soviet motives for the Afghan intervention:

There was no grand strategic plan designed by Moscow to seize a new footing on *the way to oil riches in the Middle East and thus gain global superiority over the United States*...It was a local Soviet reaction to a local situation in which the security of our southern borders was threatened by the growing instability inside Afghanistan itself and the obvious ineptitude of the Amin government (as well as by troubles in neighboring Iran).⁶²

Historical studies have supported the view that the Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan reluctantly, not as an attempt to add more crises to the “arc of crisis” or as part of some “grandiose Soviet scheme.”⁶³ Leffler has observed that Soviet leaders truly believed that Amin’s activities indicated that he might be reoriented to the West and speculated about what that might mean: Pershing II missiles in Afghanistan; the use of Afghan uranium by Pakistan or Iran; the possible fragmentation of Afghanistan and expansion of Pakistan. They were even concerned that if Iran severed all relationships with the United States, that the United States would seek to move bases to

⁶¹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 433.

⁶² Ibid., 441.

⁶³ Ibid., 447.

Pakistan and Afghanistan. The perceived risks of this happening were intolerable to the Soviet leadership.⁶⁴ Garthoff has also documented that the Soviet action was a response to “an acute local political dilemma requiring drastic remedy.”⁶⁵ Nevertheless, President Carter and Brzezinski did not view the Soviet decision to intervene in Afghanistan as a predominantly defensive decision, one grounded in national security concerns.

Soviet Intervention and Impacts on Vance

After the Soviet actions in Afghanistan, Vance’s goal was to “preserve a balanced policy.”⁶⁶ From December 27, 1979 to January 2, 1980, Vance helped to develop the administration’s immediate response to the Soviet Union, a response he described as “strong and calculated to make Moscow pay a price for its brutal invasion.”⁶⁷ Vance stated that he also helped Carter draft sections of his State of the Union Message, but Brzezinski had primary responsibility for developing the speech – a speech that reflected his strategic approach, and confirmed his foreign policy

⁶⁴ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 330-331.

⁶⁵ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 1057.

⁶⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 386.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 389.

dominance.⁶⁸ The “Carter Doctrine” unveiled in the address was really the “Brzezinski Doctrine.” Carter highlighted the “great strategic importance” of “the region which is now threatened by Soviet troops in Afghanistan.”⁶⁹ He asserted that Afghanistan’s strategic importance was tied to the fact that it was in the region that contained “more than two-thirds of the world’s exportable oil,” and charged that “the Soviet effort to dominate Afghanistan has brought Soviet military forces to within 300 miles of the Indian Ocean and close to the Straits of Hormuz, a waterway through which most of the world’s oil must flow.”⁷⁰ Having established Afghanistan’s strategic importance, Carter then enunciated the Carter Doctrine” – his statement that “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.”⁷¹ Finally, Carter embraced a regional security framework that Brzezinski had been advocating since the spring of 1979: “We are prepared to work with other countries in the region to share a cooperative security framework that respects differing values and political beliefs, yet which enhances the

⁶⁸ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 1063-1064.

⁶⁹ Jimmy Carter, "The State of the Union, January 23, 1980," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print/php?pid=33079>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

independence, security, and prosperity of all.”⁷² Significantly, in his memoirs, Vance did not allude to the “Carter Doctrine” component of the speech. In fact, Brzezinski noted that Vance had attempted to delete it.⁷³ Instead, Vance praised Carter’s enunciation of a “practical program of actions to strengthen regional security and to deter further Soviet expansion.”⁷⁴ He also applauded Carter’s statement that “although the United States would shoulder a major share of the military burden and provide the essential leadership, the defense of Western and regional security interests must be a cooperative effort. Our friends and allies, whose interests in open access to the Gulf were at least as great as ours, should contribute to the common goal of increased security.”⁷⁵ Thus, by emphasizing strategic concerns that were more than military and the value of engaging U.S. allies in productive ways, Vance managed to inject his moderate voice into Carter’s more belligerent message.

Pleased that Carter agreed not to link explicitly SALT ratification to the Soviet actions in Afghanistan, Vance supported Carter’s decision to ask the Senate to defer consideration of the treaty. Carter’s statement about delinking SALT from the invasion,

⁷² Ibid., and Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 444.

⁷³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 445.

⁷⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 391.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

however, was actually meaningless, and Vance knew it. As Lloyd Cutler, Carter's Counselor and a strong opponent of linkage, emphasized,

Afghanistan was different from Horn of Africa issues: Afghanistan was something else in that it was a major development, a new departure in Soviet policy. And even though it remained in our interest to ratify SALT II, it just became totally impractical. In effect, linkage triumphed.⁷⁶

Vance further supported Carter's program of strong sanctions, including embargoing new grain sales to the Soviet Union, stopping sales of technological equipment, restricting fishing privileges, withdrawing from the 1980 Moscow Olympics, and postponing opening new consulates. The decisions reached in the January 2, 1980 National Security Council meeting resulted in the United States adopting 26 specific measures in response to the invasion, from the tabling of the SALT treaty, to the recall of the American ambassador, to the cancellation of many scheduled trade and exchange meetings, to beginning the creation of a "de facto differential in COCOM favoring China in comparison to the Soviet Union."⁷⁷ Indeed, as Strobe Talbott underlined, in the early days of 1980, it appeared that the administration was

⁷⁶ Lloyd Cutler, "Lloyd Cutler. Exit Interview with Marie Allen, March 2, 1981," *Jimmycarterlibrary.org*, <http://jimmycarterlibrary.org/library/exitInt/exitcutl.pdf>.

⁷⁷ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Results of the NSC Meeting, January 2, 1980," *The Digital National Security Archive*, http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com/cgi-bin/cqcg?CQ_SESSION_KEY=TKGIJPSCDGOR7C.

speaking “with one voice,” something that had not occurred consistently since 1977.⁷⁸

Even though Vance was an advocate for Carter’s anti-Soviet sanctions, he continued to be dedicated to preserving balanced policies, and moreover worked to assure European allies, who were also committed to balanced policies, that “the Carter administration was not going to dismantle the structure of détente or cut off communication with the East.”⁷⁹ Vance cautioned that the Carter administration’s policies were “firm and sufficient” and “no new punitive measures were required.”⁸⁰ In particular, Vance emphasized that “the arms control dialogue must continue because it was in the interests of the Western nations to do so,” and that the United States “would seek approval of the SALT Treaty as soon as we thought there was a chance it could be ratified.”⁸¹ Vance acknowledged, however, that the Soviet interference in Afghanistan eroded support, not only for an arms control agreement, but also for other cooperative ventures with the Soviet Union. He stated bluntly: “Afghanistan was unquestionably a severe setback to the policy I advocated. The tenuous balance between visceral anti-Sovietism and an attempt to regulate dangerous competition could no longer be

⁷⁸ Strobe Talbott, “U.S.-Soviet Relations: From Bad to Worse. America and the World 1979,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 58, no. 3: 536.

⁷⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 393.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

maintained.”⁸² Vance also observed that the United States would now tilt toward policies favoring confrontation, “although in my opinion, the confrontation was more rhetorical than actual.”⁸³

One tangible sign that Vance had lost significant influence with Carter was that Carter refused to follow Vance’s recommendation that he communicate with Brezhnev “to impress upon the Soviets that their actions in Afghanistan threatened the very basis of U.S.-Soviet relations.”⁸⁴ Although Carter allowed Vance to write to Gromyko on February 8, 1980 to discuss the high risks of miscalculating each other’s actions, he refused to permit Vance to meet with Gromyko in March or to allow Marshall Shulman to meet with Brezhnev.⁸⁵ Therefore, Vance’s February 8 letter to Gromyko was the administration’s only formal written communication -- a communication characterized as a private and personal communication -- that emphasized that both countries needed to “recognize the need to act with restraint in troubled areas across the globe and that

⁸² Ibid., 394.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

unrestrained actions in any one area inevitably have an impact on our relations as a whole.”⁸⁶

Two other signs of Vance’s waning influence were Brzezinski’s ability to hold one-on-one meetings with Soviet officials, a function usually performed by Vance, and the administration’s failure to coordinate some of its Afghan policies with its European allies. In a conversation that Brzezinski held with Ambassador Dobrynin at Brzezinski’s residence, Brzezinski conveyed a position that Dobrynin stated was much tougher than statements made by U.S. allies. Brzezinski stressed that “the key issue is whether the Soviet Union insists on imposing a Communist government on Afghanistan or whether it desires an Afghanistan that is genuinely non-aligned and non-hostile to the Soviet Union.”⁸⁷ Brzezinski informed Dobrynin that if the Soviet Union tried to make Afghanistan into Mongolia, that “conflicts between us will persist.”⁸⁸ On the other hand, if they could “live with an Asian variant of Finland,” then there “could be a

⁸⁶ Cyrus Vance, "Letter from Cyrus R. Vance to his Excellency Andrey Andreyevich Gromyko, February 8, 1980," *The Digital National Security Archives*, http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com/cgi-bin/cqcgi?CQ_SESSION_KEY=TKGIJPSCDGOR7C.

⁸⁷ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Memorandum of Conversation of Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski and Ambassador Anatoliy F. Dobrynin, March 17, 1980," *Declassified Documents Reference System*, <http://www.ddrs.psmedia.com/tplweb-cgi/f...5558007>.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

relatively quickly upswing in U.S.-Soviet relations.”⁸⁹ Brzezinski also suggested that the Soviet Union could demonstrate its intentions by using neutral forces from Moslem countries “to assure Afghanistan’s genuine neutrality.”⁹⁰ Interestingly, Dobrynin, while dismissing the notion of formal Vance-Gromyko talks in the near future, asked to continue his discussions with Vance and only “perhaps” with Brzezinski.⁹¹

Vance’s deteriorating status was further reflected in Brzezinski’s ability to send out a memo to Vance and Brown in February 1980 that castigated and mocked a cable transmitted by U.S. embassy officials in Moscow to State Department headquarters in Washington.⁹² The cable, based in part upon the officials’ contacts with their Soviet counterparts, was a “think piece,” and proposed for consideration a number of actions that Brzezinski opposed, such as stopping “further moves toward China for the remainder of this year,” because “once played, China cards lose their usefulness as leverage and become excuses for Soviet counteraction.”⁹³ Brzezinski scolded the

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Memorandum for the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense on Embassy Moscow's Analysis of U.S.-Soviet Relations, February 8, 1980," *Declassified Documents Reference System*, <http://0-galenet/galegroup.comlibrary.laus.georgetown.edu/servi/>.

⁹³ Ibid.

writers for not understanding the President's views on fundamental issues. His comments about the cable and his observation that "Cy's letter to Gromyko takes exactly the proper line," implied that he was final reviewer of what State Department officials could write or think about concerning Soviet policy, and that even Vance's comments were subject to his review.⁹⁴ Earlier in the administration, Brzezinski might have made these points aggressively in a conversation or meeting, but not in a memo to his colleagues that cast himself as arbiter of what was appropriate.

Vance, however, seized one last opportunity to act as the administration's spokesman for a balanced policy in an appearance before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on March 27, 1980, just a short time before his resignation. In many ways, this testimony was Vance's valedictory, and one that he valued so much that he included it among the few documents in the appendix to his memoirs. Vance asserted that although the United States had to "maintain a military balance of power" and an "unquestionable" strategic deterrent, "our military strength, while an essential condition for an effective foreign policy, is not in itself a sufficient condition."⁹⁵ Vance went on to argue against a "fortress America," because America's future depends not only on our growing military power: it also requires the continued pursuit of energy security

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, Appendix V, 502-503.

and arms control, of human rights and economic development abroad.”⁹⁶

Acknowledging that the military and political activities of the Soviet Union posed a “serious and sustained” challenge, Vance nevertheless cautioned that a world “without SALT” would be a very dangerous world to be in, and argued for a ratification of the SALT treaty “at the earliest feasible time.”⁹⁷ Vance returned over and over again to a major theme of his world view: “Our course in the world must be defined by a mix of interests, sensibly balanced, meeting always the central imperative of national security for our country and our people. No simple slogan or single priority can answer in advance the dilemmas of the coming decade.”⁹⁸ Vance hoped that his detailed message would spark a congressional and public debate. It did not. Instead, Vance’s message, a message that turned out to be his final attempt to articulate his complex, balanced, and nuanced world view, fell on disinterested ears. Vance wryly noted that “the senators were more interested in the event of the moment, such as the grain embargo and energy. Senator Si Hayakawa carried this one step further by pressing me on the burning issue of collecting traffic fines from Iranian students in Washington.”⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Ibid., 503.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 511.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 504.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 397.

Vance's opportunities for translating his world view into effective policies were limited after the Soviet Union sent troops to Afghanistan. From Vance's perspective, however, the Soviet action produced a few policy positives. For example, U.S. policy toward Iran, especially with the hostage situation not resolved, could no longer be militant. Vance asserted that the administration was compelled "to proceed with greater care so as not to drive Iran into the arms of the Soviet Union," meaning that there would be little talk, he hoped, of a military action.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, Vance continued to argue in vain against "tilting" U.S. policy toward China. Just after the invasion, Secretary Brown made a trip to China, and offered "China nonlethal military equipment and reaffirmed an earlier decision to seek special treatment for China on high-technology transfers."¹⁰¹ This action deeply concerned Vance: "I was worried that the offer to sell China nonlethal military equipment was the first step along the road toward providing offensive weapons," a step that he adamantly opposed.¹⁰² Brzezinski, however, actively supported using "the Soviet invasion of a country in a region of strategic sensitivity to Asia as a justification for opening the doors to a U.S.-Chinese defense relationship."¹⁰³ Nevertheless, Carter decided at that time only to offer the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 398.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 391.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 431.

Chinese radar equipment and favorable trade terms relative to the Soviet Union, and to keep the arms sale as an open option.¹⁰⁴

Thus, as Vance's former State Department colleagues observed, "the post-Afghanistan climate created an exceptionally favorable market for Brzezinski's policy views, his penchant for crises, and his bureaucratic maneuvering."¹⁰⁵ In some respects, Vance assumed the role of a caretaker for the State Department. He appeared to have little impact on policy. He had always intended to leave his position after four years, but was loathe to leave before the conclusion of Carter's first term. Indeed, his March 27 testimony before Congress and his persistence in encouraging Carter to establish a dialogue with his Soviet counterparts demonstrated that Vance still sought opportunities for impact.

Nevertheless, by March 1980, Vance had every reason to resign. He could no longer advocate successfully for policies that were critically important to him. SALT appeared to be dead. Brzezinski's increased control of the foreign policy decisionmaking process -- with Carter's blessing -- signified that Vance could no longer be an effective secretary of state. But, since Vance was not a quitter, he did not resign just because of a multiplicity of sustained assaults on his authority. He needed (not

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Destler, Gelb, and Lake, *Our Own Worst Enemy*, 223.

wanted) a principle for resignation, and as described in the concluding chapter, Carter provided him with that.

CHAPTER 9. RESIGNATION -- PRINCIPLES CONFRONT THE LIMITS OF POWER

On April 21, 1980, Cyrus Vance, with great sorrow, tendered his resignation as secretary of state to President Jimmy Carter. At its core, Vance's resignation was a story with two strands: first, Vance believed that Jimmy Carter had violated principles that were critical to him; and second, Vance had the courage to relinquish a position that meant so much to him. Given Vance's loyalty to Carter and his inherent distaste for calling attention to himself, it is remarkable that he resigned from what was truly his job of a lifetime.

From late 1977 on, Carter violated many pledges that Vance believed he had made about his foreign policymaking role, gradually moved away from the world view that he and Vance had embraced at the beginning of the administration, and permitted Zbigniew Brzezinski to undercut Vance's policies and authority. Nevertheless, Vance's losing battles over issues and influence constituted only the foundation for his ultimate resignation; they did not cause it. Even significant policy losses regarding linkage and the China card, coupled with the persistent need to counter Brzezinski's unprofessional behavior, did not provoke his resignation. It took Jimmy Carter's decision to undertake a military operation to rescue the American hostages in Iran -- an operation that Vance

feared would endanger the hostages and an operation that he strongly believed would not work -- to make Vance realize that it was impossible for him to serve any longer as secretary of state. Not only did Vance disagree with Carter's decision, he also could not justify it, even if it succeeded. And so, Vance, "the most admired man in the Cabinet, the quintessential team player, and a person of unimpeachable integrity" resigned in protest.¹

The Lead Up to the Hostage Crisis

During 1978, Iran "entered a period of sustained conflict."² Michael Hunt has provided one characterization:

The whole country was shaken by strikes, peaceful demonstrations, and rioting led by militant youths who served as anti-Shah shock troops. Bloody repression, resulting in the death of between ten thousand and twenty thousand people, fed the feeling of outrage. Each period of mourning set the stage for more massive protests.³

James Bill suggested that the Shah "did take actions, both forceful and accommodating," but "nothing worked."⁴ By the fall of 1978, the Shah's "confidence

¹ "A Surprise at State," *Time Magazine*, May 12, 1980, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,920856>.

² Michael H. Hunt, *Crises in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 376.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 242.

was shattered, leaving him politically irresolute, psychologically depressed,” and not able to “bring himself to order a ruthless repression.”⁵

At the end of 1978, Gary Sick, a Brzezinski aide on the NSC, portrayed the Iranian conditions as dire: Tehran had announced that U.S. and Israeli airlines would no longer be permitted to land in Iran; the State Department was encouraging any remaining U.S. dependents to leave; a state of anarchy existed in Tehran as troops only sporadically controlled looting mobs and roving gangs; and oil production no longer supplied the needs of the Iranian people.⁶ With the Shah’s government in a state of collapse, U.S. officials contacted him after a NSC meeting on January 3, 1979 to encourage him to form a civilian government under the moderate Shapour Bakhtiar and to persuade him that “it was in his best interests and in Iran’s for him to leave the country.”⁷ Agreeing to leave, the Shah indicated an eagerness to go to the United States.⁸ U.S. Ambassador William H. Sullivan was authorized to tell the Shah that he would be temporarily welcomed at former Ambassador Walter Annenberg’s estate near Palm Springs, California. Sullivan also informed him that, to avoid setting off

⁵ Hunt, *Crisis in U.S. Foreign Policy*, 376.

⁶ Gary Sick, *All Fall Down. America's Tragic Encounter with Iran*, (New York: Viking Penguin, 1986), 151.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁸ William H. Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), 230.

demonstrations, it would be a low-profile trip, meaning that the Shah would take a route to the United States through obscure air force bases. Two days before he was scheduled to depart for the United States, however, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt extended an invitation to him to stop in Aswan and rest before heading later to the United States. The Shah ultimately decided to do this, with the understanding that his stay in Egypt would be very short.⁹ The Shah and his entourage arrived in Egypt on January 16, 1979.

After the Shah's departure and Khomeini's arrival in Iran from France on February 1, Bill suggested that "the Iranian Revolution became a reality. The United States, a country that had confidently rested its vital interests in the Middle East on the Pahlavi pillar, watched in shock and alarm as that pillar collapsed with a roar heard around the world."¹⁰ By February 9, the Iran military began to disintegrate as air base units outside of Tehran "rebelled against their officers and gave their allegiance to Khomeini."¹¹ When Prime Minister Bakhtiar resigned after the rebellion, the Carter administration grappled with whether and how to open diplomatic relations with the new Iranian leader appointed by Khomeini, Mehdi Bazargan. Then, as recounted by Vance, "a nightmare came true" as a Fedayeen band attacked the American embassy,

⁹ Ibid., 230-234.

¹⁰ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 243.

¹¹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 341.

destroyed files and equipment, and seized the ambassador and small staff after the Marine guards withdrew -- all at approximately the same time that Ambassador Adolph Dubs was kidnapped in Afghanistan.¹² However, the Americans seized at the embassy were able to escape, thanks to “the courage and coolness of Bill Sullivan and his staff,” and the “timely arrival” of Bazargan’s deputy, Ibrahim Yazdi – a secular politician and naturalized U.S. citizen who maintained close ties to the Islamic clergy and other pro-Khomeini forces.¹³

On February 16, 1979, the United States announced that it “would maintain normal diplomatic relations with the new regime” headed by Bazargan.¹⁴ Justifying this decision, Vance later emphasized that that “we believed that over time U.S. and Iranian interests in a strong, stable, non-Communist Iran should permit a cooperative, if far less intimate, relationship to emerge.”¹⁵ Bazargan and other Iranian leaders appeared to be willing to maintain a relationship with the United States as long as the United States clearly respected Iran’s autonomy and independence.¹⁶ Thus, given its hopes for a stable, pro-Western government, the United States “placed its bets on a series of

¹² Ibid., 342.

¹³ Ibid., 343.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 265.

moderate leaders,” over the next nine months.¹⁷ James Bill has explained how the State Department’s focus on the moderate politicians created two problems: first, U.S. officials had too much “visible, direct contact with the political elite of the government of President Bazargan”; and second, “officials failed to establish any meaningful relationships with the major extremist religious leaders.”¹⁸

Meanwhile, as the Carter administration was wrestling with how to interact with the new government, it also was dealing with how to relate to the Shah, who had left Egypt for Morocco. Vance later said he suspected that the Shah had dallied in Egypt and Morocco “to show his displeasure with the United States” and to be fairly close to Iran in case he could be reinstated.¹⁹ However, after two months in Morocco, King Hassan informed the United States that he wanted the Shah to leave. Carter decided that the United States could not become the Shah’s new host “because of the intense hatred now built up in Iran among the mobs who controlled the country and the resulting vulnerability of the many Americans still there.”²⁰ Vance, who agreed with Carter’s assessment of the risks of admitting the Shah, contacted a number of countries

¹⁷ Ibid., 278.

¹⁸ Ibid., 280.

¹⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 370.

²⁰ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 460.

that might host the Shah, found a home for him in the Bahamas, and then after more negotiations, in Mexico.²¹

The Shah, however, still wished to come to the United States. In July 1979, the Carter administration, with the encouragement of friends of the Shah in the United States and with the support of Brzezinski, seriously reconsidered this request. Indeed, the Shah had a formidable group of friends. David Rockefeller, Henry Kissinger, John McCoy, and others were actively lobbying Carter to admit the Shah to the United States.²² Brzezinski, who was attempting to curtail his efforts to persuade Carter to admit the Shah because he believed Carter was annoyed by his aggressiveness, noted that he was pleased that Vice President Mondale “was coming around to the view that it would be better to let the Shah come.”²³ As Sick pointed out, Brzezinski had been “intensely uncomfortable about denying asylum to a man who had been an ally of the United States for so many years.”²⁴ Moreover, Brzezinski argued that “we should not be influenced by threats from a third-rate regime, and that at stake were our traditions and national honor.”²⁵ However, as Vance informed Carter, the U.S. embassy staff, led

²¹ Ibid., 344.

²² Vance, *Hard Choices*, 344.

²³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 473.

²⁴ Sick, *All Fall Down*, 209.

²⁵ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 473.

by Bruce Laingen, counseled against this because several thousand Americans remained in Iran and would be endangered by the Shah's admittance.²⁶ Carter was persuaded by Laingen's analysis, and refused to allow the Shah to enter until Iran was more stable. The Shah then appealed to allow his children to attend school in the United States. Having been informed about the Shah's request, Prime Minister Bazargan agreed that this did not pose a problem, "although he reiterated his warning about the dangers of admitting the Shah himself."²⁷ In August and September, the administration again considered admitting the Shah, but decided against it for the same reasons: the decision could cause even more instability and anti-Western attacks in Iran; and it would endanger the embassy staff.²⁸

On September 28, 1979, Vance received "bombshell" news: the Shah was sick and wanted to come to the United States.²⁹ To explore whether or not Iran would object to the Shah coming to the United States for medical treatment, Vance met on October 3 with Yazdi, the new Iranian foreign minister, at the United Nations to discuss the Shah's medical situation and his request. According to Vance, Yazdi's response was

²⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 344.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 370.

²⁹ Ibid.

“noncommittal.”³⁰ Then, on October 18, Robert Armeo, a former aide to David Rockefeller told David Newsom that the Shah suffered from lymphoma, with a related blockage of the bile duct. The Shah, who had “traveled from Egypt to Morocco, to the Bahamas, to Mexico” desperately wanted to come to the United States for medical treatment, possibly to Sloan-Kettering Hospital in New York.³¹ The State Department’s medical doctor agreed with the diagnosis and the need for treatment.³²

As Vance framed the decision, “On October 20, we were faced squarely with a decision in which common decency and humanity had to be weighed against possible harm to our embassy personnel in Tehran.”³³ Vance and Warren Christopher then proposed to Carter that the United States notify Bazargan of the Shah’s condition and state that humanitarianism called for his hospitalization. They counseled that unless the Iranian government had a strong, negative reaction, the Shah should be admitted to a New York hospital, with the understanding that his temporary home in Mexico would be available to him upon return. Carter was almost persuaded, but called for more

³⁰ Ibid., 371.

³¹ David Newsom, *Witness to a Changing World*. (Washington, D.C.: New Academia Publishing, LLC, 2008), 311.

³² Vance, *Hard Choices*, 371.

³³ Ibid.

information and analysis.³⁴ At his request, Bruce Laingen then met with Bazargan and Yazdi who “assured him the embassy would be protected, although they warned of probably hostile demonstrations and feared that our bilateral relations would be harmed.”³⁵ In return, Bazargan asked for the U.S. government’s assurance that the Shah and his entourage would not undertake political activities while in the U.S.”³⁶ Although Carter was pleased with the Iranian government’s moderate views, he clarified that his instructions, as Brzezinski had suggested, “were to notify the Iranian officials, not to seek their permission or approval.”³⁷ At any rate, Vance noted that the next day, in anticipation of the Shah’s probable admittance to the United States, additional police were assigned to the embassy. After evaluating Laingen’s report, Carter decided to allow the Shah to receive treatment in New York on a temporary basis. The Shah arrived in New York on October 22, 1979, and had his first surgery two days later. As James Bill has observed, Carter’s decision produced a “new era in Iranian-American relations -- an era dominated by extremism, distrust, hatred and violence.”³⁸ Bill maintained that although Carter had resisted for nine months allowing

³⁴ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 463.

³⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 372

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 464.

³⁸ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 294.

the Shah to enter the United States, “he finally relented in the face of formidable pressures, including persistent lobbying for admission by the Shah’s powerful friends in America, genuine humanitarian considerations, and political calculations involving the forthcoming 1980 elections.”³⁹

Although the first reaction to the Shah’s admission was “curiously muted,” Bill identified two events that “deepened the anti-American paranoia” and “shortened the political life of the moderates.”⁴⁰ The first event involved Senator Henry Jackson publicly attacking the Iranian revolution during a Meet the Press interview in October 1979. Jackson charged that the Iranian Revolution was “doomed to failure” and that the “country was about to break up into small pieces.”⁴¹ His statements infuriated Iranian officials who assumed that he was speaking for the U.S. government. The second event involved a meeting between Iranian officials and Brzezinski on November 1, 1979 that David Newsom also referred to “as a turning point” in Dr. Brzezinski’s “activism.”⁴² Not only did the meeting impair the U.S.’s negotiating capability after the embassy officials were captured in November 1979, but it additionally provoked an undesirable

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 285.

⁴² “Interview with Ambassador David D. Newsom, June 17, 1991,” The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, CD-ROM.

change in the Iranian Government. Newsom explained that Prime Minister Bazargan and Mohammed Yazdi were at a meeting in Algiers at which Brzezinski was also present. Newsom maintained that Brzezinski sought out Bazargan to talk to him. This was a huge mistake. Iranian television published pictures of the two men shaking hands and talking. Newsom emphasized: “the fact that he met with Brzezinski damaged his relations with the Ayatollah and his group. When he came back to Iran he no longer had any power. So we had no one with whom we could deal.”⁴³ Brzezinski disputed that he made overtures to Prime Minister Bazargan, and maintained that Bazargan had made overtures to him.⁴⁴ Although Vance clearly doubted Brzezinski’s version of the story, he emphasized that it did not make any difference. Brzezinski, without authorization from Carter, without contact with Vance, had decided to hold a high-level meeting with Iranian officials at the same time that anti-Western demonstrations were paralyzing Iran. In so doing, he had undermined not only Vance’s authority, but also U.S. policy, contributed to Bazargan’s ouster from office a few days later, and possibly impaired the United States’ ability to negotiate successfully for the release of the hostages.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 476.

On November 4, 1979, a date Carter said he would “never forget,” extremist students overran the U.S. embassy in Tehran, and initially took 61 American hostages.⁴⁵ Carter contended that although U.S. officials elicited help from officials in the Bazargan cabinet and the revolutionary council, officials were not willing to challenge the students because Khomeini had praised them. As Bill summarized, “For the next 444 days, American citizens watched in helpless anger and horror as Iranian extremists held fifty-two of the American officials hostage in Tehran.”⁴⁶

The Road to Resignation

Cyrus Vance experienced the taking of U.S. hostages by Iranian militants on November 4, 1979 as a personal event because as secretary of state, he was responsible for the safety of embassy officials. They were his official family and he had treated them as such. Thus, although he described it as “an agonizing time for our countrymen and our nation,” it was also an agonizing time for Vance.⁴⁷ His response to the hostage seizure was to advocate a two-pronged policy: first, no harm shall be done to the hostages; and second, the hostages must be freed “in a manner consistent with national

⁴⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 466.

⁴⁶ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 295.

⁴⁷ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 377.

honor and our vital interests.”⁴⁸ Vance maintained that the “hostages were pawns in a power struggle and valuable only as long as they were unharmed.”⁴⁹ From the information available, Vance believed that the hostages were not in immediate danger, but he was “deeply concerned about the conditions of their captivity and the unpredictability of their captors and the emotional crowd that marched daily in the streets outside our embassy compound.”⁵⁰ Vance also feared that a retaliatory military action would “only stimulate the Shi’ite fervor for martyrdom.”⁵¹ Thus, Vance promoted using “patient diplomacy and concerted international pressure rather than force.”⁵²

Vance was convinced that “the basic strategy of restraint, escalating international pressure, and diplomacy adopted in the first days of the crisis was right and consistent with the honor and interests of the United States and the safety of the hostages.”⁵³ Nevertheless, Carter, who had embraced this two-pronged policy, also authorized planning for a possible rescue mission just a few days after the embassy’s

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 380.

seizure.⁵⁴ At the second SCC meeting regarding the hostage crisis, Brzezinski, who had “consistently favored a military solution in Iran,”⁵⁵ recommended that the administration consider three military options: “a rescue operation; a retaliatory action if any or all Americans were killed; and in the event that Iran disintegrated as a political entity, a military reaction focused on the vital oil fields in southwestern Iran.”⁵⁶ Brzezinski acknowledged that his colleagues did not support consideration of military options at this time, and at this juncture, Carter rejected these military options “as impractical or unlikely to succeed without considerable loss of life on both sides.”⁵⁷ Carter -- and Vance -- made one exception to the no-military-action policy: if the hostages were harmed or executed, the United States would respond militarily.

According to Vance, as soon as the hostages were taken, the administration committed itself to developing “a political strategy and a set of fundamental principles to guide us in freeing the hostages in a manner consistent with national honor and our vital interests.”⁵⁸ The administration’s dual-track strategy consisted of first, “open all possible channels of communication with the Iranian authorities to determine the

⁵⁴ Ibid, 476.

⁵⁵ Sick, *All Fall Down*, 200.

⁵⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 482.

⁵⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 469.

⁵⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 377.

conditions of the hostages...to learn the Iranians' motives and aims in holding them, and to negotiate their freedom"; and second, "build intense political, economic, and legal pressure on Iran through the United Nations... increase Iran's isolation from the world community, and bring home to its leaders in Tehran the costs to the revolution and to Iran of continuing to hold the hostages in violation of international law."⁵⁹ The strategy, implemented immediately after the administration realized that Bazargan and Yazdi would not be able to free the hostages, included stopping shipments of military equipment to Iran; freezing Iranian assets; bringing actions against Iran in the International Court of Justice; seeking the support of the United Nations Security Council; and opening indirect and information channels to Iran.⁶⁰

From November 1979 until March 1980, negotiations proceeded, often with different Iranian parties, in different venues, and with different negotiating conditions for the hostage release. After the economic and legal actions taken in November, the administration attempted to intensify international pressure on Iran. In response, the Security Council, with the support of the Soviet Union, demanded that Iran release the hostages immediately. In January 1980, Secretary-General Waldheim went to Tehran to try to move the negotiations forward. At this juncture, the United States agreed to an international tribunal to hear Iranian grievances, but only after the hostages had been

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 377-378.

released.⁶¹ Although the Waldheim mission was not successful, the Carter administration sent an expanded, six point list of its position to the Iranians through Waldheim, with the first point being that the safe release of the hostages had to precede the resolution of other issues. The remaining points dealt with the United States' willingness to support a forum to allow Iran to air grievances, to facilitate Iran gaining access to assets once controlled by the Shah but appropriately belonging to the Iranian treasury, to lift its freeze on Iranian assets once the hostages were freed, to assess how Iran and the United States could cooperate to deal with the threats posed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and to affirm that the people of Iran had the right to determine their own form of government.⁶²

In January, Vance felt somewhat buoyed by the opening up of a "a new channel to Tehran that allowed us to revive the idea of an international hearing linked to release of the hostages."⁶³ This entailed using the services of a French lawyer and Argentinean businessman as intermediaries to work out scenarios for releasing the hostages. The administration developed a five-step program, beginning with an agreement to allow Waldheim to appoint a commission to hear Iran's grievances and ending with an

⁶¹ U.S. Department of State, "UN Security Council Position, January 12, 1980," *Declassified Documents Reference System*, <http://0-galenet.galegroup.com.library.lausys-georgetown>.

⁶² Vance, *Hard Choices*, Ibid. 400-401.

⁶³ Ibid., 401.

agreement for the United States and Iran to form a joint commission to deal with bilateral issues. At this final stage in the process, Khomeini would “pardon” the hostages, and release them in March during a Shi’ite religious period.⁶⁴ Waldheim named the members of the commission, but by February 23, Khomeini announced that until the Majlis, which was to be elected in mid March, deliberated about the hostage issue, nothing would be decided. Vance was concerned: “The ayatollah’s announcement was a significant departure from the plan and raised doubts as to whether Khomeini had actually agreed to it. More than that, it tended to confirm the view that he intended to hold the hostages until all the main institutions of an Islamic state were in place.”⁶⁵ The administration decided that even though it could not comprehend Khomeini’s intentions, it was worthwhile proceeding with the work of the commission, as long as there was evidence that it was making progress in getting the hostages transferred to government control. As Carter expressed it, “[Iranian President Elect] Bani-Sadr began to make speeches in Iran designed to isolate the militants from the general public and to remove the aura of heroism from the kidnappers. We read his words with great interest, hoping they signified Iranian preparation for release of the hostages.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴Ibid, 403.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 404.

⁶⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 495.

Nevertheless, by the end of March, all of Carter's foreign policy principals were frustrated by the fact that the Majlis elections had been postponed, and that the confirmation of Bani-Sadr as president, the formation of a parliament, and the selection of a permanent government in Iran seemed weeks away. When it appeared that Bani-Sadr would try to take control of the hostages, Carter sent a letter to him that demanded the hostages be transferred to the Iranian government. If the Iranian government did not take action, Carter threatened to impose "non-belligerent measures that we have withheld until now."⁶⁷

As March ended, Vance was profoundly concerned that Carter was seriously considering a military action. On March 22, Carter asked Vance to prepare to impose formal trade and economic sanctions, to expel Iranian diplomats, and to survey the financial claims against Iran. Moreover, he was to elicit the support of allies, ask them to break diplomatic relations, and also institute sanctions. Finally, Vance was to alert them that a military action was being considered. Vance admitted: "I was worried where this was leading us."⁶⁸ Since the early SCC meetings about the hostage situation, Vance had been concerned that the administration continued to explore plans for a military rescue mission, but was comforted by the fact that even though Carter found some of the newer proposals more feasible, they were not feasible enough. After a

⁶⁷ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 406.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 406-407

March 22 briefing on military options, Carter confirmed this: “They still needed more work and I was not yet convinced that we should proceed, but I wanted to investigate all options.”⁶⁹

Under Brzezinski’s direction, the investigation of military options continued. This investigation, however, involved a limited number of officials, and did not include Vance. As Brzezinski described: “I presided also over a small and highly secret group, involving only Harold Brown, General Jones, and Stan Turner, which was concerned with the development of military options. None of the other members of the SCC were permitted to take part in the meetings of this group, and we often met in my office rather than in the Situation Room.”⁷⁰ The secretary of state was not privy to the group’s deliberations.

During this time, Vance was not only deeply involved in providing input to the negotiations for the release of the hostages, but was also absorbed in the policymaking related to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Robert Strauss’s negotiations in the Middle East. In addition, Vance was in the throes of another foreign policy controversy that substantially weakened Carter’s political support in the American Jewish community and Vance’s own standing with Carter. In violation of an agreement that Carter had with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin about determining the status of

⁶⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 511.

⁷⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 478.

Jerusalem only through negotiations -- an agreement that necessitated not mentioning Jerusalem's status in any resolutions that might come before the UN Security Council, U.S. Ambassador Donald McHenry had cast a vote in the Security Council that condemned the establishment of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank. McHenry's vote reflected U.S. policy about the occupied West Bank; however, the UN resolution also referred to Jerusalem, specifically the need for Israel to "respect and guarantee religious freedoms and practices in Jerusalem and other Holy Places in the occupied Arab territories."⁷¹ This reference infuriated the Israelis because "it included Jerusalem as part of the occupied territories without acknowledging that the western half of the city had been part of Israel prior to 1967."⁷² When Vance and Christopher instructed McHenry how to vote, they told him to vote for the resolution because they both assumed that the Jerusalem references had been deleted. Unfortunately, that was not the case. After McHenry's vote, the outcries from Americans Jews and the Israelis were deafening. To respond to their concerns, the administration retracted its vote. Vance assumed responsibility for the confusion and the mistaken vote. However, he later testified, to Carter's great displeasure, that the "wording of that controversial anti-Israel resolution had not violated U.S. policy after all -- despite Carter's recent

⁷¹ Terrence Smith, "President Terms Anti-Israel Vote in U.N. an Error," *The New York Times*, March 4, 1980, sec. A, p. 1, 6.

⁷² Ibid.

statement that the United States now regretted having voted in favor of the resolution because it violated important aspects of U.S. policy.”⁷³ President and Mrs. Carter supposedly never forgave Vance for issuing a policy clarification that contradicted Carter’s own statement.⁷⁴ Indeed, Carter characterized it as “a serious blow to me – both the original vote and the accurate image of confusion among Ambassador McHenry, the Secretary of State, and me.” Carter maintained that episode not only was a major factor in his primary election losses in New York and Connecticut, but also “it proved highly damaging to me among American Jews throughout the country for the remainder of the election year.”⁷⁵

Throughout this tense and extremely demanding period, Brzezinski and Vance were clearly at loggerheads about the guiding principles for dealing with the hostage situation. When Vance raised the benefits of encouraging the Shah to leave the United States in order to tamp down the anger of the Iranian militants about the U.S.’s continuing association with him, Brzezinski mentioned to NSC staffers that it was

⁷³ Vance's statement, however, about the wording not being in violation of U.S. policy was correct. Vance was simply stating existing U.S. policy. See Martin Schram, "The Day Cyrus Vance Pulled the Rug from under Carter," *The Washington Post*, March 26, 1980, sec. A, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Hal Saunders confirmed in his January 22, 2002 interview with the author that the White House blamed Carter's loss of the New York primary election directly on Vance and that Vance unfairly had to shoulder this burden.

⁷⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 503-504.

amazing that only he, a naturalized citizen, was “the one to speak up for American honor...I wondered what this indicated about the current American elite and whether we were not seeing here symptoms of a deeper national problem.”⁷⁶ Essentially, Brzezinski was accusing Vance of being both soft and unpatriotic. Brzezinski insisted: “Though I shared Cy’s concern for the hostages and I admired his personal commitment to them, I felt that in the end our national honor was at stake.”⁷⁷ It was not clear why Brzezinski believed that an intense concern for the safety of the U.S. hostages and the justifiable concerns about the potential efficacy of a military action violated national honor. Moreover, Brzezinski appeared to equate Vance’s concern with emotionalism and an incapacity to perform objective analysis. Although Brzezinski stated that he admired Vance’s commitment to the hostages, he also charged that Vance’s feelings were “stirred by meetings with their families.”⁷⁸ Therefore, Brzezinski suggested that his approach, which was “to avoid such meetings in order not to be swayed by emotions,” was vastly superior.⁷⁹ In brief, Brzezinski was conveying: Vance cannot make good decisions grounded in the facts; only I have true perspective.

⁷⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 480-481.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 480.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 481.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Brzezinski maintained that the “decision to try to rescue the hostages by force crystallized in a three-week time span, approximately from March 21 to the final decision day of April 11.”⁸⁰ In March 1980, the Shah was living in Panama temporarily, but because he feared for his life, he flew from Panama to Egypt on March 23, and thus provoked a hardening of positions among Iranian militants who were angered by the Shah’s proximity to Iran. As Carter noted, the militants’ threats about holding trials, punishing the hostages, and indefinitely postponing elections signified that the release of the hostages was neither imminent nor certain.⁸¹ Carter responded by threatening to impose even stricter sanctions and possibly blockading Iranian seaports if the hostages were not released by April 1. After many rounds of negotiations about transferring the hostages, it was clear to Carter by April 4 that “the Revolutionary Council would never act, and that, in spite of all our work and the efforts of the elected leaders of Iran, the hostages were not going to be released.”⁸² At this point, Carter decided to implement tougher economic sanctions, to embargo all goods to Iran except medicine and food, to break off diplomatic relations, to expel Iranian diplomats, and to

⁸⁰ Ibid., 487.

⁸¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 511.

⁸² Ibid., 515.

review financial claims against Iran. Significantly, he again “also discussed various possible military operations with my most senior advisors.”⁸³

During a Camp David meeting on March 22 that included Vance and his other key advisors, Carter listened to a briefing on a rescue mission proposal by General Jones, and based upon Jones’s portrayal of its feasibility, authorized a reconnaissance mission to confirm the viability of the components dealing with refueling and transfers of rescue teams. Speaking in favor of the mission, Brzezinski acknowledged that the mission could be accompanied by loss of life, and suggested characterizing it as a “punitive action” if it failed.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, after listening to the various arguments, Carter did not decide to authorize the mission at that time. He appeared, however, to be leaning toward it. To sway him against a military action, Vance relayed reports he had received from State Department officials, including Director of the Iran Desk Henry Precht, who assured him that if the United States attempted to use force to free the hostages, “Not only would many of the hostages lose their lives but other Americans in Iran, in the Gulf, and in Pakistan would be placed in grave danger. There would be serious consequences across the Middle East and our relations with Europe could suffer.”⁸⁵ After listening to Vance’s adamant opposition to the mission, Carter,

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 488.

⁸⁵ Information from 2/17/2002 e-mail from Henry Precht to Mary Sexton.

according to Brzezinski, impatiently asked -- well, what do you suggest? Do you want to sit around and wait and leave the hostages imprisoned? Carter and Brzezinski asserted that even the threat of a rescue mission might get the allies to join the United States in stiff sanctions against Iran. Having heard the comments and having authorized reconnaissance, Carter then asked Vance "to prepare a message to our allies requesting them to break diplomatic relations and institute sanctions by a fixed date."⁸⁶ Vance was also to warn them that the alternative was military action. Vance prepared one message to Bani-Sadr that emphasized that the United States needed a "tangible sign" that there would be "real movement towards a prompt resolution of the crisis," such as the government taking control of the hostages. The message also warned that if Bani-Sadr did not act, "we shall be taking additional non-belligerent measures that we have withheld until now."⁸⁷ The second message, which was sent to the governments of Germany, Britain, France, and Japan, urged the governments to contact Bani-Sadr so that "he might clearly understand the seriousness of the present moment and the consequences that will flow from continued Iranian intransigence." In the event that Bani-Sadr did not comply with the U.S. request for transfer of the hostages to the government, the message alerted the allies that the U.S. would take further "and more

⁸⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 407.

⁸⁷ U.S. Department of State, "Message to Be Delivered as Soon as Possible To Bani-Sadr and Message to Allies, March 25, 1980," *Declassified Documents Reference System*, <http://0-galenet.galegroup.com.library.lausys.georgetown.edu/servlet/DDR5?>

severe unilateral actions,” and asked that they join the United States in severing diplomatic relations with Iran.⁸⁸

After this meeting, Vance was extremely concerned that Carter “was losing faith that the strategy worked out in November and December could produce positive results,” and that “discussions about a range of military actions were accelerating.”⁸⁹ Moreover, he was distressed that “increasingly, I heard calls for ‘doing something’ to restore our national honor,” because for Vance, national honor and national interest were not the same thing.⁹⁰ Vance was still convinced that diplomacy, sanctions, and the stabilization of the Khomeini government would result in the peaceful, safe release of the hostages. Vance once again clarified with Carter that he opposed the use “of any military force, including a blockade or mining, as long as the hostages were unharmed and in no imminent danger” for three compelling reasons: he believed that military missions would endanger the hostages; he believed that military action “could jeopardize our interests in the Persian Gulf and perhaps lead Iran to turn to the Soviets”; and finally, he believed that “even if Tehran did not seek support from Moscow, Khomeini and his followers, with a Shi’ite affinity for martyrdom, actually might welcome American military action as a way of uniting the Moslem world against the

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 407.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

West.”⁹¹ Vance acknowledged that the drawn-out approach to negotiations was “painful,” but explained that “our national interests and the need to protect the lives of our fellow Americans dictated that we continue to exercise restraint.”⁹²

On April 7, Carter convened a formal NSC meeting, which produced an agreement to break diplomatic relations with Iran -- an agreement that Vance opposed, and decisions to adopt more stringent economic sanctions and to consider a military action and blockade in the future. On April 11, with Vance out of town and Warren Christopher sitting in for him without instructions or full knowledge of Vance’s position, Carter expressed his belief that the hostages would not be released soon and that the time had come for more aggressive, specific actions.⁹³ The group heard reports from CIA Director Stansfield Turner and Joint Chiefs Chair David Jones that argued that a military rescue was feasible and ready. Mondale emphasized that the hostage situation was “intolerably humiliating.” Brzezinski, noting that the President already knew his position, further suggested that given weather and night-time conditions that the mission should occur as soon as possible, that the United States should consider taking prisoners to use as bargaining chips in the event that Iran seized more hostages, and that “we should consider a simultaneous retaliatory strike in the event the rescue

⁹¹ Ibid.,408.

⁹² Ibid., 408.

⁹³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 492.

failed.” Only Warren Christopher presented the case for nonbelligerent options.⁹⁴ Furthermore, according to Christopher, Carter stated that he had spoken to Vance before his departure and that Vance was not firmly opposed to a military mission.⁹⁵ Then, Carter approved the mission, saying: “We ought to go ahead without delay.”⁹⁶

For Carter to hold this meeting without Vance, the secretary of state who had provided him with expert, high-quality advice throughout his tenure, was an incredible slap in Vance’s face. Moreover, to have implied in the meeting that Vance was not firmly opposed to a rescue mission was dishonest. (After the meeting, Jody Powell confidentially told Christopher that “contrary to the impression the president might have given, he thought Vance was opposed.”)⁹⁷ Nevertheless, it was Carter’s decision to support the military action, not the fact that the meeting took place when Vance was away or the fact that Carter had misstated Vance’s position on the rescue plan, that provoked Vance’s resignation.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 492-493.

⁹⁵ Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, 98.

⁹⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 493.

⁹⁷ Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, 100.

The Resignation

The most expansive -- and it is not all that expansive -- account of Vance's resignation decision came from Vance's description of it in three pages of his memoirs. What emerged from Vance's account was that his decision drew from all aspects of his character and experience. Essentially, Vance resigned because, based upon his experience with complicated military operations, he believed it was highly unlikely that the mission would be successful, and he believed that it created "grave risks" for the hostages' safety. Vance further believed that to undertake this military action in the name of national honor violated national interests. And in knowing and believing these things, Vance recognized that he could not publicly justify Carter's decision.

Prior to resigning, however, Vance made one more attempt to persuade Carter to forego a military action. Stating that he was "stunned and angry that such a momentous decision had been made in my absence," Vance met with Carter on Tuesday, April 15, the day after he returned to Washington. During the meeting, Vance reiterated the case for continued diplomacy and no military rescue. Carter then offered to convene the National Security Council so that Vance could argue his views one more time before the group. When Vance returned to the State Department to work on his presentation, he was struck by the fact that this was a qualitatively different disagreement than he had ever had with Carter:

I thought not only about the rescue mission, but also about my ability to continue as secretary of state if the president affirmed his determination. I had disagreed

with policy decisions in the past, but accepting that men of forceful views would inevitably disagree from time to time, had acquiesced out of loyalty to the president knowing I could not win every battle.⁹⁸

Drawing from his vast, previous experience in the Defense Department and his own service in the military, Vance reviewed the details of the plan, and concluded that not only would the mission endanger the hostages' safety, but it most likely would not be successful. In fact, "the decision to attempt to extract the hostages by force from the center of a city of over five million, more than six thousand miles from the United States, and which could be reached only by flying over difficult terrain" was incredibly foolhardy.⁹⁹

When Vance constructed his final no-military rescue arguments for the National Security Council, he pulled together his complete case for continuing with diplomacy, negotiations, and sanctions. He asserted that the United States was making progress in persuading the allies to adopt tough sanctions; that it appeared that hostages would now be under the jurisdiction of the Majlis, the new Iranian legislative body, and that this would improve the U.S. ability to negotiate; the hostages were healthy and safe now; and finally, in the unlikely event that the rescue attempt would be technically successful, it was highly likely that some hostages and Iranians would be killed.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 410.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Vance also cautioned his colleagues that “even if the rescue mission did free some of our embassy staff, the Iranians could simply take more hostages from among the American journalists still in Tehran.”¹⁰¹ Finally, Vance impressed upon the group that in his view the only justification for a military rescue mission would be “that the danger to the hostages was so great that it outweighed the risks of a military operation,” which was not the case.¹⁰² Vance succinctly and sadly summarized the negative response to his presentation: “No one supported my position and the president reaffirmed his April 11 decision.”¹⁰³

Describing himself as deeply anguished, Vance consulted family and friends about resigning, and found that the more he talked about it, the more he knew that he had to resign as a matter of principle. He later recalled that it was after these conversations that he felt convinced that “this was a matter of principle on which I should resign.”¹⁰⁴ Vance admitted that he knew that Carter was in political trouble and he did not like abandoning him. Nevertheless, Vance emphasized “by Thursday, April 17, I knew I could not honorably remain as secretary of state when I so strongly disagreed with a presidential decision that went against my judgment as to what was

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 410-411.

best for the country and best for the hostages. Even if the mission worked perfectly, and I did not believe it would, I would have to say afterward that I had opposed it, give my reasons for opposing it, and publicly criticize the president.”¹⁰⁵

In a conversation with Carter on Sunday April 20, Vance told him he would resign. Vance stated that Carter encouraged him to stay in office and that he would allow him later to explain his principled opposition to the rescue mission. Vance realized, however, that this was an untenable situation. On April 21, Vance submitted his formal letter of resignation and clarified that it was a final decision and not dependent upon the success or failure of the mission.¹⁰⁶ Vance described this day as "one of the most painful days of my life, as I am very fond of Jimmy Carter. We had become close friends, and I was torn at having to leave him in this time of trouble. With great sorrow I handed him the letter."¹⁰⁷

Having agreed to Carter's request not to reveal the resignation until the conclusion of the rescue mission, Vance attempted to offer support to the group that was monitoring the mission scheduled for April 24. On April 25, the rescue attempt was over with disastrous results. Carter announced that the mission had been aborted, that helicopters had been abandoned in the desert, and that there were casualties when a

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 411.

helicopter collided with a C-130 aircraft at the desert landing site. As Christopher observed: “The mission failed almost before it began.”¹⁰⁸ On the morning of April 28, Carter announced Vance’s resignation and Edmund Muskie’s appointment as secretary of state. Lloyd Cutler, Warren Christopher, and other State Department officials also wanted to resign, but Vance persuaded them to stay.

The Meaning of Vance’s Resignation

Even though Cyrus Vance did not resign to accomplish something, other than to act according to his principles, it is reasonable to ask whether or not Vance’s resignation had an impact that went beyond Vance’s own satisfaction of having done the right thing. Did Vance’s resignation change government policies? Did it affect the behavior of public officials? Did it inspire other people to resign in similar situations? Or, was it significant because it was such a rare, important act in American political life?

No evidence exists that Vance’s resignation affected U.S. policy toward Iran or other countries in any substantial way. His resignation may have had a “restraining effect on Carter’s willingness, in an election year, to take reckless military risks to

¹⁰⁸ Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, 103.

liberate the hostages and save himself,”¹⁰⁹ but Carter’s decision not to authorize another rescue mission was probably explained by many other factors, including a desire not to schedule another mission with a strong potential of failure. Furthermore, since Senator Muskie, Vance’s replacement, generally supported the policies advocated by Vance, there was remarkable continuity in the State Department’s positions on significant issues.

Immediately after the resignation, many observers in the media suggested that Vance’s resignation would raise “grave questions about nothing less than President Carter’s methods and judgment in forming foreign policy,” and observed that Vance’s departure “could only damage the President’s re-election chances.”¹¹⁰ Indeed, Vance used the occasion of giving a commencement address at Harvard in June 1980 to question in a relatively low-key way Carter’s policies and Brzezinski’s input into those policies. Not only did he criticize using a “master plan” to guide solutions to local problems, but he also suggested that it was dangerous to undertake “military solutions to nonmilitary problems.”¹¹¹ He further called on the Senate to ratify the SALT treaty as soon as possible, and cautioned against election year “smart politics” that could

¹⁰⁹ James Reston, "Washington Yale Man at Harvard," *The New York Times*, June 8, 1980, sec. 4, p. 19.

¹¹⁰ "A Surprise at State," *Time Magazine*, May 12, 1980, 2, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,920856>.

¹¹¹ "Cyrus Vance's Valedictory," *Newsweek*, June 16, 1980, p. 28.

produce “bad policies.”¹¹² As compelling and thoughtful as Vance’s speech was, it was not likely that it influenced the American electorate in any appreciable way. It was far more likely that the American electorate dismissed Carter in November 1980 for a whole host of domestic and foreign policy reasons, with the continuing hostage crisis a key factor.

Even though one can conclude that Vance’s resignation produced no apparent or conclusive systemic, policy, or political changes, this does not mean that Vance’s resignation had little meaning. First, Vance’s resignation was extraordinarily significant to the people with whom he worked, as documented in the hundreds of letters he received after his decision that are now in his papers at Yale University’s library. As Warren Christopher asserted in a letter to Vance after his resignation: “Your decision on a clear matter of principle will stand as a symbol and a high standard for decades ahead. It will give strength and renewed dedication to your colleagues and supporters. We will not be able to match your performance, but you encourage us to try.”¹¹³ The Vance colleagues interviewed for this study also unanimously stated that Vance was indeed their inspiration for how high-level government official should behave. In discussing Vance’s impact on his career, Harold Saunders’ eyes welled up

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ “Warren Christopher, to Cyrus R. Vance, April 28, 1980,” Cyrus R. and Grace Sloane Vance papers, Yale University Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

with tears as he discussed Vance's ability to focus on what was important and to retain that focus, the impressive breadth and depth of knowledge, his commitment to treating everyone well, and his ability to motivate the people who worked with him.

Emphasizing that Vance's resignation was a terrible loss, Saunders asserted that Vance epitomized the best of his generation.¹¹⁴ Indeed, every person interviewed for this study suggested that Vance was a "Great Man," worthy of an historian's scrutiny in an era that often avoids analysis of "Great Men." Every person suggested that Vance made a huge, enduring difference in their lives. In fact, many of Vance's colleagues intended to resign in protest to support Vance's resignation decision, but Vance argued against solidarity with him and for remaining in the government to support the policies they had embraced -- another factor which endeared Vance to them.¹¹⁵

Second, Vance's actions provided a model of how to resign effectively. He did not seek to embarrass Carter. He sought only to adhere to his principles. According to Edward Weisband and Thomas M. Franck who have studied the topic of principled resignations, American politicians rarely resign because the political system and

¹¹⁴ See "Saunders Interview with Author," January 22, 2002.

¹¹⁵ Brinkley, "Out of the Loop," sec. E, p. 44.

political culture do not support it.¹¹⁶ But Vance demonstrated not only that it is possible to do principled resignations effectively, but moreover that resignations can be critical for maintaining one's own integrity and the integrity of the policy making system.

Finally, Vance's resignation drew attention to the importance of ethical action in the public sphere, and the old aphorism that people are indeed what they do. Even before Vance assumed the role of secretary of state, he was known as a man of principle. Unlike Carter and Brzezinski, however, Vance never claimed to be a man of principle. But his unwavering effort as secretary of state to support the policy agenda he proposed to Carter in 1976, along with his protest resignation, confirmed his reputation. As Saunders suggested, Vance demonstrated that "a leader's ultimate resources in dealing with another leader are the steadfastness and steadiness of his position, the absolute trustworthiness of his word, and the soundness and firmness of his commitment to his own goals."¹¹⁷ Significantly, no historian, observer, or reporter of the Carter administration has ever ascribed that package of qualities to Carter or Brzezinski.

¹¹⁶ Edward Weisband and Thomas M. Franck, *Resignation in Protest. Political and Ethical Choices between Loyalty to Team and Loyalty to Conscience in American Political Life*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1976).

¹¹⁷ The Council on Foreign Relations, *American Hostages in Iran. The Conduct of a Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University, 1985), 265.

Vance's resignation did not make him a great man or a great secretary of state. As the analysis in this study has suggested, he was neither a failure nor an outstanding secretary of state. What Vance's resignation revealed, however, was that he truly *was* a "Great Man," who acted with uncommon courage and honor, and who refused to embrace "an American foreign policy which is hostage to the emotions of the moment."¹¹⁸ Something of great value therefore occurred during the Carter administration: a secretary of state fought for over three years for strategic policies that were in the national interest, and, when it was important to do so, he resigned a job of a lifetime as a matter of principle.

¹¹⁸ "Text of Vance Speech at Harvard on Foreign Policy," *The New York Times*, June 6, 1980, sec. A, p. 12.

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