



Comments on Panel 5

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PANEL 5: The Carter Administration's Foreign Policies-Human Rights

Chair: **Dave Schmitz**, Whitman College

“Taking the High Road to Failure: Carter's Human Rights Agenda in East-West Relations” by **Werner Lippert**, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

“Moral Necessities and National Interest: Rethinking U.S.-Latin American Relations in a Human Rights Era” by **Vanessa Walker**, University of Wisconsin Madison

“The ‘Loss’ of Iran: Carter’s Return to Realpolitik” by **Barbara Zanchetta**, University of Florence, Italy and Tampere University, Finland

Commentator: **Scott Kaufman**, Francis Marion University

At last year’s SHAFR conference, I was asked to comment on a panel on Carter’s foreign policy.¹ I started by pointing out that there is a dichotomy with respect to Carter; looking at these papers today, I think it is important to point out that dichotomy again. For instance, a survey of 78 presidential scholars published in 2000 found Carter ranked among the ten worst presidents in American history. Yet he was also ranked among the ten most underrated chief executives.² Likewise, a May 2006 Quinnipiac University poll found Carter among the five best *and* worst presidents since the end of World War II.³

No doubt that retrospection – such as comparisons between the current administration and Carter (which Carter himself brought up in the past few weeks) – have had an impact. It is also likely that Carter’s activities since leaving the White House, including his work with Habitat for Humanity and the Carter Center, have made many Americans take a second look at his time in Washington. What is clear is that a difference of opinion exists on Carter’s presidency, and it is seen here in these interesting and well-researched papers.

Dr. Lippert argues that the relationship between the United States and Western Europe – with a focus on West Germany – soured during the Carter presidency, in

¹ [H-Diplo note]: SHAFR 2006, Panel 29- Jimmy Carter and US-Third World Relations. Conference program available at <http://www.shafr.org/meeting06/program.htm>.

² <<http://falcon.arts.cornell.edu/Govt/courses/Fo4/PresidentialRankings.pdf>> Accessed 5 June 2007.

³ <<http://www.pollingreport.com/wh-hstry.htm>> Accessed 5 June 2007.

large part because of Carter's human rights policy. He rightly points out that West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt regarded Carter's human rights campaign as preachy, naive, and harmful both to West Germany's interests and to détente writ large. While Schmidt's feelings about Carter's human rights campaign have been covered in both his memoirs and by a number of scholars – including that by my father and myself – Lippert's extensive use of the *Cold War International History Project* and of both U.S. and German language sources adds much to the story.

What I think would add even more to this paper is if Dr. Lippert, while keeping the focus on human rights, would periodically point out that the West German government had become upset with the U.S. president for more than just its concern over the impact his human rights policy would have upon détente. Carter in 1977 had tried to stop the sale of a West German nuclear power plant to Brazil,⁴ Schmidt had assailed Carter's handling in the spring of 1978 of the neutron bomb,⁵ the two had different priorities when it came to the so-called "locomotive strategy,"⁶ and in 1979-80, the two men sparred over whether West Germany was prepared to accept some of the 572 Pershing II and ground-launched cruise missiles NATO had agreed to deploy in Western Europe to counter the Soviet deployment in Eastern Europe of SS-20s.⁷

I would also like to see some more on the personalities of Carter and Schmidt. Schmidt could be abrasive and sanctimonious, as seen when he placed all the blame on Carter for the U.S. decision not to produce or deploy the neutron bomb; the chancellor seemed to have forgotten that while he supported the bomb's deployment in West Germany, he had been unwilling make that decision public because of widespread opposition to the weapon in West Germany. Carter,

⁴ Hans W. Gatzke, *Germany and the United States: A "Special Relationship"* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 232; and Burton I. Kaufman and Scott Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr.*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 59.

⁵ In addition to the work my father and I wrote, see Sherri L. Wasserman, *The Neutron Bomb Controversy: A Study in Alliance Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1983); and oral history interview with Jimmy Carter, 29 November 1982, Miller Center, University of Virginia

⁶ In addition to Gatzke and the book my father and I wrote, see W. Carl Biven, *Jimmy Carter's Economy: Policy in an Age of Limits* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Bernhard May, "The World Economic Summits: A Difficult Learning Process," in Detlef Junker, ed., *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War, 1945-1990*, vol. 2, 1968-1990 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁷ See Wolfgang Krieger, "German-American Security Relations, 1968-1990" in Junker, ed., *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War*, 2:120; Jonathan Carr, *Helmut Schmidt: Helmsman of Germany* (New York: St. Martin's 1985), 126-30, 134; and Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relation from Nixon to Reagan*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1994), 784, 943, 955.

as Dr. Lippert points out, expected others to see the righteousness of his decisions; this ties in very closely with Carter's trustee mentality. It also says much about Carter as a politician. As First Lady Rosalynn Carter once commented, quite accurately, I would argue, "Jimmy was never really a politician. My definition of a politician is you let the people guide you. Jimmy is more of a leader who wants people to follow him."⁸ Such differences in personality led Schmidt to call Carter "idealistic and fickle," while the U.S. president referred to his West German counterpart at varying points as "difficult," "personally abusive," "somewhat unstable," and "quite emotional." Indeed, at the Venice summit, the differences between the two men generated what Carter called "the most unpleasant personal exchange I ever had with a foreign leader."⁹

Although it goes beyond the scope of his paper, Lippert does raise a question that has been around for some time, which is the extent to which Carter's human rights policy played a role in the downfall of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Robert Gates contends it did have an impact; Daniel Thomas is less certain.¹⁰ Lippert points out, as have others, that by the mid-1970s there were already cracks appearing in the Soviet system. Thus, did Carter open them even wider by assailing the Soviets for their human rights abuses, or would those cracks have grown on their own, Carter or not?

Dr. Zanchetta's comments about the continuing American commitment to Iran, despite Carter's human rights, nuclear nonproliferation, and arms control initiatives, has been covered by other scholars.¹¹ Iran was, indeed, viewed as a

⁸ "True Believer," *People*, 12 June 2000, 155.

⁹ Helmut Schmidt, *Men and Powers: A Political Retrospective*, trans. Ruth Hein (New York: Random House, 1989), 181; and Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1995), 118, 119, 546-47.

¹⁰ Robert Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 175-76, 177, 179; Daniel C. Thomas, "Human Rights Ideas, the Demise of Communism, and the End of the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7 (Spring 2005): 110-41.

¹¹ See, in addition to James Bill, Marvin Zonis, *Majestic Failure: The Fall of the Shah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); David Harris, *The Crisis: The President, the Prophet, and the Shah - 1979 and the Coming of Militant Islam* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2004); David Farber, *Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter with Radical Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Barry M. Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience in Iran* (New York: Penguin, 1981); Michael Ledeen and William Lewis, *Debate: The American Failure in Iran* (New York: Vintage, 1982); Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986); Kaufman and Kaufman, *Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr.*, 2nd ed.; Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran* (New York: Random House, 1985); and Benson Lee Grayson, *United States-Iranian Relations* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981).

keystone to the policy of containment in the Middle East; in fact, as early as the end of January 1977, the administration made clear that it would make exceptions to its human rights policy so as to avoid damaging ties with strategically important nations, including Iran.¹² As Zanchetta notes, President Carter violated his own arms control policy; although she does not mention this, there was even a report that, despite his claimed intention to stop the proliferation of atomic technology, Carter reached an oral agreement with the shah to provide Iran with nuclear power plants. Carter reportedly received assurances from the shah that his government would abide by international safeguards and not provide that technology to other countries.¹³

What I think is more important about this paper is Zanchetta's point that the Carter Doctrine did not suddenly emerge as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan but rather that it came out of an assessment of U.S. regional policy that had been going on for a year. While this argument has been developed to some extent by others,¹⁴ it has not been addressed as directly as Zanchetta is doing here.

I would suggest, therefore, that Zanchetta elaborate on this point regarding the expansion of America's military and political role in the Persian Gulf region as a result of the situation in Iran and prior to Carter's 1980 declaration. Here, she could address U.S. policy toward North Yemen and the Carter administration's decision to provide that country with \$390 million in military assistance in March 1979.¹⁵ In July 1979, Carter ordered the CIA to provide the rebels fighting in Afghanistan with nonlethal military assistance.¹⁶ Finally, Zanchetta might look more into the Carter administration's preparedness to move forward with

¹² Bernard Gwertzman, "Vance Says the U.S. Won't Be Strident Over Rights Abroad," *New York Times*, 1 February 1977, A1.

¹³ Sick, *All Fall Down*, 25, 29.

¹⁴ Garthoff points out, for instance, that the "perceived [Soviet] threat and direct American response...had been developing for several years, with a focus on the arc of crisis in the Afro-Asian Third World." See Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 731.

¹⁵ For more on this, see Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*), 719-26; Carol R. Saivetz, "Superpower Competition in the Middle East and the Collapse of Détente," in Odd Arne Westad, ed., *The Fall of Détente: Soviet-American Relations during the Carter Years* (Boston: Scandinavian University Press, 1997), 84; Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), 181, 447; Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 172-74.

¹⁶ Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 220-21; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 427; Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 46.

Brzezinski's idea for a rapid deployment force.¹⁷

Vanessa Walker, who is less critical of Carter, points to the influence of nongovernmental organizations upon the president's foreign policy, with specific attention given to the IPS. That NGOs influenced specific parts of Carter's diplomacy is not new. One need only look at the impact of the Brookings Institution and the Trilateral Commission upon his Middle East and foreign economic initiatives. What is new here is the influence of an NGO upon another aspect of Carter's foreign policy, that of his approach toward Latin America. Indeed, one must wonder whether it is time for someone to write a broad-based work on the impact of NGOs upon the development of the whole of the president's diplomacy.

What is also intriguing is Walker's argument that Carter threw off a legacy of gunboat interventionism by using quiet diplomacy, backed by international law, to promote human rights within Chile. She rightly admits that Carter's policy might still be regarded as interventionist, but not in the same category as the president's predecessors.

Finally, Walker notes that Carter's human rights policy toward Chile was pursued less aggressively than the IPS wanted. To Carter, a combination of carrots and sticks was the way to convince repressive countries to uphold the rights of their people; to the IPS, the president was proving himself less committed to the cause than it had originally assumed he would be.

I have several comments regarding this paper. First, I would be very interested to know more about how the IPS felt about Carter's policy toward Chile after 1977, and particularly following the May 1979 decision of the Chilean Supreme Court not to turn over to the United States three Chilean officials charged with being involved in the 1976 murder in Washington, DC, of former Chilean Ambassador to the United States Orlando Letelier and an American citizen, Ronni Moffit. Carter not only publicly assailed the Pinochet government but cut virtually all diplomatic and economic ties with Chile.¹⁸ Walker suggests that the IPS was unhappy that Carter did not go further – such as cut all relations with Santiago – but I would be interested in seeing more on this topic.

¹⁷ For more on the RDF, see Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn: U.S. Security Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia, 1953-1991* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), esp. chap. 10; Jerry W. Sanders, *Peddlers of Crisis: The Committee on the Present Danger and the Politics of Containment* (Boston: South End Press, 1983), 259.

¹⁸ "U.S. Cuts Nearly All Ties with Chile, Accusing Regime of Condoning Terrorism," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 December 1979, pt. 1, 2.

Second, did the IPS attempt to influence administration policy by using its relationship with, say, Pastor, or by going through the Bureau of Human Rights (HA)? One of the purposes of HA was to allow NGOs a voice in the State Department,¹⁹ and its head, Patricia Derian, was a strong supporter of promoting human rights in U.S. diplomacy. Did the IPS attempt to work through HA to make its voice heard?

Third, Walker should be prepared for criticism from those who will argue that while there might be varying degrees of interventionism, interventionism is still interventionism. Even members of the Carter administration seemed to recognize this. Commented Anthony Lake, the president's head of the Policy Planning Staff, "Unhappily, in a complicated world and for any but the most simple of political philosophies, principles themselves – when put into practice – may collide as often as they coincide. So it was with the principles of respect for the sovereignty of other nations and support for human rights."²⁰ Again, I find Walker's argument intriguing, but there will be those who will challenge her conclusion.

Fourth, Walker points out that during his visit to Washington, DC, in 1977, Pinochet commented that his coup had been designed "to preserve human rights." Walker notes, "Pinochet's use of human rights rhetoric to legitimize brutalities, no matter how insincere or hypocritical, speaks to the degree to which the importance of human rights had become entrenched in international diplomacy." I question this. A number of Latin American scholars have noted that the governments of the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay) and elsewhere in Latin America viewed themselves as being in the midst of World War III. In this war, their nations were under attack by internal subversion directed from Moscow.²¹ In the name of self-defense and protecting the freedom of their people, the military leaders of these countries, including Pinochet, argued that they had to act, with repression if necessary. Once the internal threat was over, then they could restore the freedoms of their citizens.²² In short, what Pinochet told Carter,

¹⁹ See David Earl Morrison, "Human Rights Foreign Policy Decision Making in the .S. State Department and Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs: Process and Perception." Unpublished dissertation. (College Park: University Of Maryland, 1987), 65-71.

²⁰ Anthony Lake, *Somoza Falling* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 21. Robert Kagan makes a similar argument with regard to Carter's policy toward Nicaragua. See his book, *Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 51-52.

²¹ This idea was inspired by the work of James Burnham. See his book, *The War We Are In: The Last Decade and the Next* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1967).

²² Ariel Armony, "Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America." Unpublished thesis. (Athens: Ohio University, 1992), Frederick M. Nunn, *The Time of the*

I would suggest, was not something new inspired by Washington's human rights initiative but rather a continuation of what the Chilean leader had been saying all along.

Finally, Walker contends that international pressure forced Chile "to address its human rights problem." There is a debate over the extent to which the U.S. president had an impact upon the level of repression abroad.²³ While Carter has been credited with the release of some political prisoners, most notably Jacobo Timerman in Argentina, one must ask whether internal factors were equally, if not more, important. Looking at the impact of the human rights initiative worldwide, Rick Inderfurth, a special assistant to Brzezinski, admitted to the NSC head in December 1978 that the reasons for the improvement (or lack thereof) in the protection of human rights abroad were "complex." Sometimes U.S. pressure played a role. "In many cases, however, especially where substantial and far-reaching improvements have taken place, these changes have reflected dramatic internal political developments."²⁴

There was in fact pressure on the Pinochet government from within. Most

Generals: Latin American Professional Militarism in World Perspective (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992); Alain Rouquié, *The Military and the State in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); David Pion-Berlin, "The National Security Doctrine, Military Threat Perception, and the 'Dirty War' in Argentina," *Comparative Political Studies* 21 (October 1988); and David Pion-Berlin and George A. Lopez, "Of Victims and Executioners: Argentine State Terror, 1975-1979," *International Studies Quarterly* 35 (March 1991).

²³ For both sides of this debate, see Robert Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 175-76, 177, 179; Daniel C. Thomas, "Human Rights Ideas, the Demise of Communism, and the End of the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7 (Spring 2005): 110-41; Pierre, *The Global Politics of Arms Sales*, 252; Snow, *America's Mission*, 261; Abraham F. Lowenthal, "Jimmy Carter and Latin America: A New Era or Small Change?," in Kenneth A. Oye, Donald Rothchild, and Robert J. Lieber, eds., *Eagle Entangled: U.S. Foreign Policy in a Complex World* (New York: Longman, 1979), 293; David D. Newsom, "The Diplomacy of Human Rights: A Diplomat's View," in David D. Newsom, ed., *The Diplomacy of Human Rights* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America/Georgetown University Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, 1986), 11; Kathryn Sikkink, "The Effectiveness of US Human Rights Policy, 1973-1980," in Laurence Whitehead, ed., *The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 100-2; John Dumbrell, *The Carter Presidency: A Re-evaluation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 184, 194; Douglas Brinkley, "The Rising Stock of Jimmy Carter: The 'Hands on' Legacy of Our Thirty-ninth President," *Diplomatic History* 20 (Fall 1996): 523; Roberta Cohen, "Human Rights Diplomacy," 237, 238; Harold Molineau, "Carter and Human Rights: Administrative Impact of a Symbolic Policy," *Policy Studies Journal* 8 (Summer 1980): 879-85; and Friedbert Pflüger, "Human Rights Unbound: Carter's Human Rights Policy Reassessed," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 19 (Fall 1989): 709-10.

²⁴ Inderfurth to Brzezinski, 1 December 1978, NLC-11-3-7-10-8, Jimmy Carter Library.

notable was the Catholic Church, which actively resisted the junta.²⁵ There were also protests by women in Chile, whose loved ones had become among those who “disappeared” during Pinochet’s period in power.²⁶ Additionally, one must wonder if a reason for the decline in repression was because most of those willing to stand up against the government were dead or in jail. As one professor commented before Congress in 1979 with reference to Uruguay, “There have been relatively few new arrests, simply because there are so few people left to object in any way.”²⁷

It is clear based upon these papers that the debate over the wisdom, if not effectiveness, of Carter’s diplomacy will go on. I hope that all three presenters will continue to pursue their topics, with the intention of seeing their papers in published form, as I believe what they have to say will add much to this ongoing debate.

— Scott Kaufman
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²⁵ Ernest S. Sweeney, “The Church and Liberation in Latin America: Historical Perspectives from the Pinochet Regime,” *Thought* 61 (September 1986), 309-10, 312-13.

²⁶ Jennifer G. Schirmer, “‘Those Who Die for Life Cannot be Called Dead’: Women and Human Rights Protest in Latin America,” *Feminist Review* 32 (Summer 1989): 9, 17-19.

²⁷ Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on International Organizations of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 96th Cong., 1st sess., May 2, 10; June 21; July 12; and August 2, 1979, 389.