

Itai Nartzizenfield Sneh. *The Future Almost Arrived: How Jimmy Carter Failed To Change U.S. Foreign Policy.* New York: Peter Lang, 2008. 373 pp. \$34.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8204-8185-2.



Reviewed by Rowland M. Brucken

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Commissioned by Rebecca K. Root (Ramapo College of New Jersey)

Any historiography of American human rights diplomacy must start with books and articles written in the late 1970s. Inspired by Jimmy Carter's seemingly original foreign policy, books published during his presidency by A. Glen Mower Jr. (*The United States, the United Nations, and Human Rights* [1979]), Sandy Vogelgesang (*American Dream, Global Nightmare: The Dilemma of U.S. Human Rights Policy* [1980]), and Peter G. Brown and Douglas MacLean (*Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy* [1979]) attempted to explain the theoretical and historical underpinnings of Carter's humanitarian emphasis. These foundational works were followed by historians, such as Thomas J. Knock (*To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* [1992]), Carol Anderson (*Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African-American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* [2003]), Elizabeth A. Borgwardt (*A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* [2005]), and Mary Ann Glendon (*A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

[2001]), who accessed archival sources to show how earlier leaders, such as Woodrow Wilson and Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, articulated human rights policies that nonetheless fell short of their expansive rhetorical visions.

Itai Nartzizenfield Sneh places Jimmy Carter in this group as well. His book is both a political biography of Jimmy Carter and a study of the president's human rights diplomacy during and after his term in office. The work succeeds more as the former than as the latter, as there is little mention or analysis of the implementation of Carter's foreign policy. The emphasis is clearly on summarizing its formulation within the executive branch (and, to a far lesser extent, Congress) during his first two years in office. Sneh clearly outlines candidate Carter's soaring rhetoric about the need for a foreign policy infused with moral values; a commitment to helping peoples worldwide realize the full spectrum of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights; and a forswearing of cynical realpolitik.

Yet Carter fell short of his own vision, according to Sneh. Granting Cold Warrior realist Zbigniew Brzezinski a commanding role as "vice president for foreign policy and national security" while assigning a retiring and unimaginative Warren Christopher to mediate between the far more powerful Brzezinski and doves Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and his assistant Patricia Derian denied strong human rights advocates decision-making authority (p. 232). Additionally, Carter's own unwillingness to shun a realist worldview and hold tyrannical but economically or strategically important allies accountable for human rights abuses created a credibility gap. Even after he left the Oval Office, Carter showed a disturbing willingness to compromise his own stern code of personal ethics by maintaining questionable business and personal relationships, including with shady financiers in the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) and tyrannical leaders, such as Raul Cedras in Haiti and Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia.

The strength of the book is its focus on Carter as a politician. As Sneh chronicles the Georgian's rise to power, one sees the personal ambition, arrogance, and unwillingness to delegate that marked him as a self-righteous micromanager. In this role, the president often compromised his own values to protect a personal image as a problem solver and champion of the powerless. Carter becomes a man who lusts not for money, sex, or titles, but for influence and relevance by using these intangibles to restore his post-presidential reputation.

Sneh's work, though, suffers from organizational shortcomings, factual errors, and omissions that detract from his thesis and supporting arguments. The introduction is misnamed, as it does not provide a thematic or contextual roadmap but merely a fragmented historiography on Carter's presidency in general. The second chapter's description of human rights as a theme in American diplomacy curiously skips over the two decades

after 1941, when the United States played a leading role at the United Nations in drafting the cornerstones of international human rights law. A middle chapter entitled "Carter and the Middle East" barely mentions President Carter's policies except in general execution; there is precious little discussion of policymaking within the White House on appropriate responses to crises in Iran and Afghanistan, not to mention internal discussions predating the Camp David Accords. Finally, the substantive chapters on Carter's presidency focus mainly on policy formulation during Carter's first two years in office while neglecting the last two years, except in reference to events occurring outside of the United States. Errors of fact include the claims that the United States abstained as the UN General Assembly approved the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and that the Atlantic Charter contained no human rights principles. In addition, the work fails to mention or explain President Carter's decision to sign the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights or to recommend Senate ratification of the Genocide Convention. Moreover, there is only one passing reference to the most horrific human rights atrocity that occurred on Carter's watch: the autogenocide in Cambodia.

In addition, internal contradictions and problems with the author's prose at times obscure the argument under construction. At times, Sneh views Carter as an arrogant idealist who refuses to change his mind if it involves compromising his own values, but at other times Sneh shows Carter's willingness to compromise in ways that make him a conventional opportunistic politician. With the book's focus more on policymaking than implementation, it is hard to judge Sneh's claim that Brzezinski's "Kissingerian" Cold War realpolitik contained little room for human rights considerations, for he did criticize the Soviet Bloc for its repression of dissent. Brzezinski's policy proposals indicated a willingness to confront apartheid and push for Senate ratification of human rights

treaties, both of which Henry Kissinger had staunchly refused to do.

Although a lesser point of criticism, Sneh also might be a little too hard on Carter for not embracing the fulfillment of economic, social, and cultural rights globally due to the inherent difficulty in defining exactly what they consist of, who or what is responsible for fulfilling them, and the lack of resources available to do so in a time of global inflation and recession. Lastly, in regard to actions Carter did take to uphold human rights principles, such as suspending aid to allies Argentina and Nicaragua while facilitating a transition to majority rule in Zimbabwe, there are only passing references without explanation.

In summary, Sneh provides an intriguing political biography of Carter as well as an insightful section on human rights policy formulation within the executive branch. It falls short by omitting coverage and analysis of the policy's execution and its impact on other nations and peoples.

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