

PARADOX
OF
POWER

**THE UNITED STATES
IN SOUTHWEST ASIA,
1973-1984**

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Swing toward Liberal Internationalism: The Carter Years

Three things had become evident by the mid-1970s: first, that Southwest Asia, the region stretching from Turkey to Pakistan through the Persian Gulf and North Africa, required a single, comprehensive policy; second, that U.S. economic well-being and political security depended on its success; and third, that the advantages that had been gained at the close of the Kissinger years were precarious and likely to be lost if the United States did not forge a more permanent arrangement of peace based on a mutuality of interests in Southwest Asia. The Carter years must be judged in the context of these new perceptions. This chapter will trace the evolution of Carter's Southwest Asia policy, its rationale, its contradictions, and also its achievements.

Carter's Global Perspective

President Carter inherited the Kissinger initiatives as well as their consequences: a new regional balance demanding a coherent and integrated response in Southwest Asia; an East-West relationship that was eroding rapidly under the impact of events in Africa; and a restive Congress polarized over issues of Soviet strength and U.S. weakness. On each count, Kissinger's policies had ultimately failed. The measures he adopted for East-West accord had angered a growing number in the Congress, while his attempts to counter the criticism of "weakness" had drawn fire from an equal number in the liberal opposition. As Stanley Hoffman aptly observes, "just as Vietnam had become a symbol of the moral bankruptcy of containment and destroyed the ethical base of the contained crusade, all the disappointments—domestic and

internal—of the descending phase of this era came to symbolize the moral deficiency of *realpolitik*.¹ As Carter campaigned for the presidency, the nation was divided over fundamental issues of foreign policy such as the wisdom of detente, the perils of and profits from intervention, and the U.S. approach to revolutionary nationalism in the Third World.

Among the many factions clamoring for attention then, a group of liberal internationalists strongly represented by corporate interests and moderate thinkers known as the Trilateralists came to the forefront.² They called for a “redistribution of global resources and a new international order for mutual gain and the aggressive defense of human rights.” The latter found particular favor with Jimmy Carter, the Democratic candidate for the presidency in 1976. To the post-Watergate United States, shamed and humiliated by the prolonged public disclosures of moral turpitude in the highest office of the land, themes of morality and rectitude were sweet music. The issues the Trilateralists took up also held a historic appeal for the U.S. public—an open and clean administration, international concord, nonintervention, and support for democracy and human rights throughout the world. In 1977, however, the liberal call for and on behalf of internationalism belonged to a different genre. It rejected the *hubris* that had led to the downfall of both the conservatives who called for U.S. military supremacy and the Wilsonian brand of liberalism that wished to spread U.S. values; instead, it praised moderation, eschewed hegemonic pretensions, and promised to harness U.S. moral energy to the cause of peace and international cooperation. The new platform emphasized the common problems of mankind—world hunger, economic development, and oppression. It also exhorted the nation not to confuse anticommunism with democracy and authoritarianism with stability. President Carter declared that the United States must free itself from the inordinate fear of communism that had in the past clouded its choices and led the nation into war on behalf of oppressive regimes. He also warned against the argument that the defense of capitalism was a defense of democracy, and cited the brutal civil war and the American intervention in Chile as a prime example of this kind of wrongheaded thinking. The Carter program exuded confidence in America’s ability to demonstrate rectitude in her conduct abroad and foster democratic forces in the Third World. However, underlying all this was the recognition that America could not shape the world alone. The Wilsonian ideals were still desirable, but the world had changed drastically. It was no longer possible to impose America’s ideals from a position of military superiority. In this, the Carter perspective was different from all the previous brands of liberalism in the United

States. The new administration called for a “framework of peace” with which “our own ideals gradually can become a global reality.”

The concern for human rights and the economic problems of the Third World was derived from a growing realization that the problems of poverty and peace in the world were inseparable. The survival and health of the Western economies themselves depended on such international cooperation, and although in the past it could be obtained through coercion, in the post-oil-embargo world, this was no longer possible. Similarly, stability in the Third World depended on continued growth and widening political freedom, neither of which were attainable without the cooperation and support of the advanced West. The world had become highly interdependent, where problems of peace called on the ingenuity of engineers and economists, rather than of soldiers and strategic planners. The Trilateralists pointed out that with the whole of the industrialized world in debt to the oil producers, and with the vast increase in the share of their own trade with these and the newly industrialized countries, the old relationships of dominance and dependence had to give way to a more equal partnership, particularly with the oil-rich nations of Southwest Asia. In other words, the United States needed to end the antagonism that had characterized its relations with the Third World, and move its policies more into line with their requirements and perceptions. This, in their and Carter’s view, was also the most effective way to counter the problem of growing Soviet influence in the Third World.

While the above perceptions shaped Carter’s philosophy, the empirical basis for these views emerged from a study he ordered of Soviet capabilities and intentions, later to be known as Presidential Review Memorandum 10 (PRM 10).³ This was a major assessment of the global balance, and reflected the administration’s initial judgment of Soviet intentions. The study concluded that, at this juncture, the two superpowers stood at parity in weapons, but in comparison with the strength and scope of the U.S. economy, the Soviet Union was destined to remain a weak power, particularly since it was likely to suffer serious shortages of capital and labor, as well as failures in agriculture, in the coming decade. PRM 10 concluded that long-run trends therefore favored the United States, and advocated a more relaxed stance toward the “Soviet threat” and a vigorous pursuit of SALT II. This was, however, totally contrary to the thinking of many influential members of the legislature, the Pentagon, and the CIA.⁴

On the issue of nonintervention, Carter’s policies revolved around the achievement of three interrelated objectives. The first and the second were meant to reduce the need for intervention, while the third was intended to ensure the tactical readiness of U.S. forces to intervene

if all diplomatic efforts failed. The first of these policies sought to increase America's tolerance of revolutionary nationalism in nonvital areas of the world and the discontinuation of overt and covert operations in support of counterrevolutionary forces. Carter's support to Daoud in Afghanistan, his reoriented policies toward sub-Saharan Africa, and support of the revolutionary front in Nicaragua reflected the new American stance. The rationale behind the attempt to align the United States with the progressive forces of the future and behind nonintervention was the proven instability of repressive regimes. He firmly believed that the reactionary regimes of the Third World belonged to the past and wanted them to liberalize internally, or forgo American support. What is more, many of these regimes violated human rights, an issue on which Carter felt strongly and on which he sought definite commitment from all those who wanted U.S. support on a tactical plane. He believed that popular nationalist regimes would be far better placed to resist pro-Soviet influence. This would make American intervention unnecessary.⁵ A corollary to this approach was the extension of diplomatic and economic assistance to regional power centers (i.e., India and Brazil) in lieu of entering into military alliances with unstable and insecure regimes in the Third World. Carter did not, however, extend this liberal vision to nations that he considered vital to American interests, such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia. Carter continued extending military assistance to them, despite the fact that most of these regimes were guilty of violating every principle of human rights. But outside these "sensitive" countries, there was to be a new emphasis on the reduction of arms sales. Carter argued that instead of increasing American military presence abroad, he would harness the influential countries in each region, preferably the progressive ones, to promote regional security.

The third focus of his policy was the security of the Persian Gulf. Carter stressed the need to strengthen American conventional strike forces to give them the capacity for preemptive action to protect the West's trade and oil routes. But he also emphasized the need to hold talks with the Soviet Union for the demilitarization of the Indian Ocean. Unfortunately, this aspect of his policies remained relatively neglected until the upheavals in Afghanistan and Iran in the fateful year of 1979.

In sum, when Carter took office, his administration pledged a departure from earlier policies that were wedded somewhat narrowly to *realpolitik* and the pursuit of a policy of containment. Instead, he promised to initiate an open administration, revive liberal idealism in the United States, tolerate progressive and even revolutionary nationalism, foster and defend human rights, and give greater attention to the

growing economic needs of the Third World. All this he promised to do within the framework of growing detente with the Soviet Union. But there were a number of flaws in this strategy. First, Carter had not determined an order of priority about which areas were vital and which could be ignored for the sake of detente, nor had he worked out what the United States would do if the Soviet Union were to score advances in the areas considered vital to U.S. interests. But most of all, he had made no effort to define these issues clearly or to build congressional and public support for their implementation.

In view of this lack of clarity, it is not surprising that Carter's detente policies ran into difficulty from the very beginning.⁶ Denied a yardstick by which to judge which areas were vital and which areas were not, the U.S. public and the media continued to perceive every political change in the Third World as a setback for the United States and a potential threat to its security. And faced with the prospect of a loss of public support, Carter was forced time and again to revise his stand, and promise to "hang tough" with the Soviet Union. Thus, in the second phase of his term in office, which began roughly around the end of 1977, President Carter dropped all references to human rights in the Soviet Union. The uneasy negotiation over SALT II continued through 1977 and 1978, but their future appeared to grow increasingly dim as the political situation deteriorated in the Horn of Africa, Iran, and Afghanistan.

Carter's Emerging Regional Priorities

What did the new directions that Carter sought to give U.S. policy imply for Southwest Asia? How did the United States propose to consolidate its position, and safeguard its interests, in the face of intensifying distrust between it and the Soviet Union? Could Israel expect a continued U.S. commitment to its territorial ambitions? Could Iran and Saudi Arabia continue to count on strategic cooperation? And what was Pakistan to expect from an administration that spoke in glowing terms about democratic India?

The Western Rim of Southwest Asia

The Carter administration took office with a commitment to seek a more enduring and encompassing settlement in the Middle East than had been achieved before. Accordingly, Carter announced that the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict would receive the highest priority in his administration. He pointed at the changed political perceptions of the states in the region—the Israeli position, Arab moderation,

and the deescalation of the civil war in Lebanon—and insisted that the time was ripe for a fresh look at the Middle East and for new initiatives in the region. President Carter, therefore, eschewed several key elements of the Kissinger era, including step-by-step strategy, stalemate diplomacy, and separation of the Palestinian issue from an Arab-Israeli agreement. Instead, he adopted a comprehensive strategy of active participation in which Arab and Israeli interests were more evenly balanced.

The administration argued that all Washington had done so far with its leverage was to establish a cease-fire at a higher level of arms; it had not tackled the basic problems that had caused the wars. President Carter now wanted a policy that directly spoke to the outstanding issues between the Arabs and Israel. In this endeavor, he saw the United States not as merely a mediator but as an integral element in the peace process.⁷ To this end the president was willing to bring the full weight of U.S. power, prestige, and resources to bear on the negotiating parties.⁸ It was clear that both in substance and procedures President Carter had made a major departure from the approach of his predecessor.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There were five major assumptions in the Carter approach.⁹

1. *Urgency.* Carter believed that the Arab-Israeli conflict was a dangerous threat to U.S. interests in the region, particularly its oil interests, and that a repeat of the 1973 embargo had to be avoided. It was essential, therefore, to begin work immediately on a dialogue for peace in the Middle East.
2. *The U.S. Role.* Washington would be an active participant in reconciling differences and filling the "security assurance" gap if this participation was required.
3. *The Soviet Role.* The Soviet Union was interested in detente and in avoiding confrontation in the region. It was therefore likely to play a positive role, and Washington would encourage Moscow's participation.
4. *Approach to the Arabs.* Washington would promote the role of the moderate Arab states in the process, but it would also deal with the radical Arab regimes and try to bring them into negotiations. Carter believed these states had been forced into playing a negative role because of the past U.S. attempt to divide and isolate them.
5. *Approach to Israel.* Israel had to realize that, while its security was Washington's first interest and Carter would

continue with military assistance as in the past, Israeli notions of timing, tactics, and substance would no longer receive the first consideration in Washington.

The connections between President Carter's liberal internationalist thrusts and his Middle East policies are not difficult to identify. First, he had argued that in the past the United States had been overly preoccupied with communism; as a result, it had missed opportunities for peace with the Soviet Union and influence in the Third World, where many regimes professed socialist or leftist nationalism. Since this preoccupation was no longer valid, the president would seek Soviet participation as well as a unified Arab endorsement for his peace proposals. Second, in line with Carter's policy to promote self-determination and human rights in the world, the Palestinians, who had long been denied such rights, were to receive full attention. And third, Carter's aversion to force dictated that all regional parties to the dispute, including their superpower allies, were to be brought into the negotiations. Carter believed that comprehensive accord would protect local regimes from the threat of aggression and diminish the need for U.S. intervention.

Out of this conceptual framework three central elements of the Carter design emerged: first, the meaning and substance of peace had to be redefined; second, territories and borders had to be ensured and firmly defined; and third, the Palestinian role had to be redefined. Defining the substance of peace he envisaged, Carter said,

that means that over a period of months or years . . . the borders between Israel and Syria, Israel and Lebanon, Israel and Jordan, Israel and Egypt must be opened up to travel, to tourism, to cultural exchange, to trade, so that no matter who the leaders might be in those countries the people themselves will have formed a mutual understanding and comprehension and a sense of a common purpose to avoid the repetitious wars and death that have afflicted the region so long.¹⁰

Carter was thus committed to an accord that went beyond mere nonbelligerency.

The second element concerned territory, withdrawal, and secure borders. Carter did not identify precisely the lines of the future borders between Israel and the Arab states, but believed that Israel would have to withdraw from all occupied territories to the pre-1967 lines, with minor adjustments and modifications to allow for defensible borders.¹¹

The Palestinian element assumed increasing significance in the Carter framework. In the past, the United States had either deliberately neglected the Palestinians or emphasized only the humanitarian di-

mension of the problem. President Carter was the first to officially recognize the legitimacy of the Palestinian demand for a homeland.¹² Although he did not go so far as to endorse an independent state for the Palestinians, he did envisage a Palestinian homeland linked in some way with Jordan.¹³ In return the Palestinians had to recognize the Israeli right to exist and refrain from violating Israel's borders or her security.

IMPLEMENTING THE FRAMEWORK

Through 1977 to the end of 1979, President Carter determinedly tried to implement the framework and preserve the directions he had initiated. There were several setbacks and many obstacles, and the eventual shape of the Arab-Israeli agreement at Camp David was not what he had originally envisaged. On the whole, however, his efforts paid off.

As early as Carter's second month in office, Secretary of State Vance had gone to the Middle East to lay the groundwork for the administration's effort. This was followed by a round of exploratory visits by the regional leaders to Washington, in which each expressed his view, and the requisite conditions for peace. For instance, Israeli Prime Minister Rabin sought a statement of support to bolster his image at home and positive responses from Carter on coproduction of F-16 jet aircraft and sale of concussion bombs to Israel. Sadat arrived in Washington on 3 April seeking economic and arms assistance, and stressed the centrality of the Palestinian question. In May, Crown Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia paid a visit to Carter during which both agreed that "the major effort should continue toward trying to reconvene the Geneva conference in the second half of 1977."¹⁴

This process received a serious setback in May 1977 when Menachem Begin won the election in Israel.¹⁵ Begin's hard-line view on the Palestinian question and his determination to claim the West Bank and the Gaza were well known. The Carter administration feared that Begin might not play a positive role in the framework outlined by Washington. On his part, Begin was apprehensive about growing "pressure" from Washington.

Through early 1977, several Carter decisions had heightened the Israeli anxieties. For instance, Carter had cancelled the sale of CBU-72 concussion bombs and declared Israeli oil drilling in the Gulf of Suez illegal. The Carter-Begin meeting in July 1977 helped to smooth over some of these differences, but upon Begin's return, the legalization of West Bank settlements once again drove a wedge between Carter and Begin.

The administration continued in its efforts to reconvene the Geneva conference. Vance once again visited several capitals in the Middle East, but his trip was shadowed by Israeli settlement activities in West Bank.

The major problem for the administration was to evolve a formula for Palestinian representation at Geneva that would be acceptable to all. The administration proposed a unified Arab delegation that would include Palestinian representation. Israel agreed to Palestinian representation as long as it did not include the PLO, but the Arab states objected to this Israeli veto.

On 1 October 1977, hoping to influence the pre-Geneva bargaining, the United States and the Soviet Union issued a joint statement stressing the need to achieve a "just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict." The statement made explicit reference to the "legitimate rights of the Palestinian people." Explaining the administration's move to bring Moscow in, Vance said, "If they were prepared to play a constructive role as I believe they were in 1977, then I feel it would be much better to include them, because they could become a spoiler if they are not included."¹⁶

The joint statement opened floodgates of criticism from many directions. Israel did not like bringing the Soviet Union into the process because the Soviet presence was bound to strengthen the positions of such virulently anti-Israeli elements as Syria and the PLO in the talks. Israel was particularly apprehensive about the references to Palestinian rights and feared that Washington would compromise Israeli interests in its efforts to win favor with the Arab states. President Sadat appeared equally perturbed by the joint statement. He did not think much would come out of the Geneva process. He was extremely suspicious of Soviet intentions and believed that Egypt could no longer afford to postpone peace on its borders with Israel. The Egyptian economy was in serious difficulty, needing immediate attention and a massive infusion of resources.

In an unprecedented move Sadat announced on 9 November 1977 that he would go to Israel to discuss their mutual problems. Begin readily accepted the challenge. Sadat's move undercut the administration's entire conceptual framework. The initiative was now lost to Egypt and Israel while the rest of the Arab states, the Soviet Union, and even the United States were forced to watch from the sidelines. This is not what Carter had anticipated.

In fact, Carter had not anticipated the extent and strength of the adverse reaction to the joint statement. For instance, Congressman John Rhodes, Republican minority leader in the House, wrote in the *New York Times* that "the President succeeded in bringing our foremost

adversary back into a position of influence in the Middle East."¹⁷ Brzezinski admits in his memoirs, "we clearly needed the input of the President's domestic advisers, because the foreign policy of a democracy is effective only as long as it is sustained by strong popular support."¹⁸ These words are especially relevant to a consideration of the last two years of the Carter administration. The pro-Israeli lobbies on Capitol Hill had gone to work whipping up opposition to the Soviet inclusion. By October, the president had abandoned all hope for reconvening the Geneva Conference.

Sadat was, however, anxious to have the United States back in the negotiations. The diplomatic activities following Sadat's historic visit began to be narrowed down to reconciliation of two major positions. Begin's autonomy plan envisaged an "administrative autonomy" for the West Bank and Gaza while Israel would remain responsible for defense and security. This meant a degree of freedom for the Palestinians but not self-determination. And Sadat's counterproposal basically reiterated the conditions set out in Resolution 242. On 4 January 1978 Carter met with Sadat at Aswan and devised what came to be known as the Aswan formula, which linked Egypt-Israel agreement to the arrangements for the West Bank and Gaza.¹⁹ Israel had tried to prevent such a linkage. Begin retaliated by continuing the settlement activities and stating that Resolution 242 did not mean withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza. Their diplomatic maneuvering was soon overshadowed by yet another cycle of the violence that is endemic in the Middle East. After a PLO attack on a busload of tourists on 11 March 1978, Israel invaded southern Lebanon, intending to drive the PLO out of areas bordering on Israel's northern settlements.

Despite the invasion, however, Egypt and Israel continued to negotiate. Finally, in September 1978, after much discord between Carter and Begin, an agreement over two documents was signed by Israel, Egypt, and the United States. These documents were the "Framework for the Conclusion of a Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel" and the "Framework for Peace in the Middle East." The former was an agreement to conclude a final treaty that would provide for total Israeli withdrawal (in phases) from the Sinai, establish security zones, and bring about a full Egyptian-Israeli peace. The latter, which was more complicated, provided arrangements for negotiating the procedures for the election of a transitional self-governing authority on the West Bank and Gaza, terminating Israeli military presence there, and negotiating the final status of the West Bank and its relation to its neighbors. Jordanians and Palestinians were to be invited to participate in these negotiations.

Israel had signed the accords but feared that the second document would lead to a Palestinian state. Begin therefore continued with the West Bank settlements. The Carter administration saw this as an attempt to undermine the accords, and turn them into a separate peace agreement between Egypt and Israel. Carter threatened Begin with a "reassessment of [the U.S.] entire Middle East policy," just as his predecessor had done in 1975.²⁰ Not until Carter had paid a presidential visit to Cairo and Jerusalem did the contending parties make sufficient concessions to arrive at an agreement. The formal signature of the peace treaty took place at the White House on 26 March 1979.

A significant number of influential individuals, however, claimed that Carter's policies had greatly weakened U.S. strategic capabilities in the region. They felt that in pressuring Israel and in wooing the Arabs, Carter had not sufficiently acknowledged Israel's traditional role as a reliable ally and great strategic asset of the United States. In one view, Israel had "the best and most advanced facilities in the area, the best trained personnel, and by far the most stable political system." Given U.S. vulnerability in the area, the critics claimed, Carter had compromised a vital U.S. security interest and in fact inadvertently encouraged the Soviet Union to take advantage of the oversight.

Against this criticism it must be pointed out that Carter had displayed rare consistency, fairness, and tenacity in implementing his conceptual framework. He had been set back by Sadat's trip to Israel, but in his justification, for a comprehensive peace the president has been proven right. Had the Camp David negotiation included the PLO and the other Arab states, the later tragedies in Lebanon might have been avoided. In addition, Carter was correct in fearing for Egypt's isolation from the Arab world. Although this has been less dangerous than originally feared, Sadat's assassination and frequent instability in Egypt underline the risks involved in a lonely and separate path to peace.

With the signing of the Camp David agreements, the United States had become a direct partner in peace. The agreements also laid the groundwork for America's enduring influence in shaping the future of Arab-Israeli relations. It is certainly not correct to argue that Camp David had weakened the U.S. strategic position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. The 1979 revolution in Iran was indeed such a setback, but it would require a great and implausible stretch of imagination to argue that the Islamic revolution was hatched in Moscow or that it has enhanced Soviet influence. Nor was it in any way related to Camp David. Similarly, there is no connection between the U.S. role in Camp David and the Soviet decision to invade Afghanistan. Even if Carter had

continued the traditional policy of diplomatic coordination with Israel, that in itself would not have deterred the Soviets from invading Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, the president had been remiss in neglecting to mobilize popular and congressional support for his initiatives. This neglect forced him to abandon the pursuit of the Geneva conference, and to jeopardize most of his policy goals. His global strategy and the philosophical underpinnings of his liberal initiatives came under increasing attack. This shift in political support had become visible as early as mid-1977, when the simmering tensions suddenly gave way to a war between Somalia and Ethiopia over Ogadan.

The Southern Rim of Southwest Asia

The Horn of Africa had been in ferment since the mid-1960s, mainly because of unresolved tribal and territorial disputes. Somalia claimed the region of Ogadan, which was under the actual control of Ethiopia. While Emperor Haile Selassie ruled Ethiopia, it was backed by the United States as a part of the U.S. policy of supporting the three kingdoms of the region, Saudi Arabia and Iran being the other two. At that time, Somalia was supported by the USSR, which had obtained permission to construct a major base at the port of Berbera. Most strategy experts believed that this was an important asset if the USSR wished to influence North Africa and the southern gulf states.

These regional rivalries had larger implications. In 1977, there was a reversal of alliances between the regional contenders and their superpower supporters. Seeking strategic advantage, the USSR switched its support to Ethiopia. Simultaneously, having failed to get Moscow's endorsement for its ambitious plans, Somalia switched its alliance to the West.²¹ In July 1977, Somalia invaded the Ogadan region of Ethiopia and made steady gains through the rest of the year.

As the situation worsened, the Soviet Union mounted one of its most spectacular and efficient airlifts, and sent 17,000 Cuban troops to Addis Ababa to help Ethiopia survive and repel Somali aggression. Cuban troops had already intervened in Angola in 1975, but on a scale that bore no comparison with this massive airlift.²² It was this direct Soviet involvement that rang alarm bells in Washington. The Carter administration came under heavy fire from its conservative critics for its alleged inability to counter Soviet adventurism in North Africa. Carter found himself on the horns of a dilemma. If he came to Somalia's help, it would escalate tensions with Moscow and possibly abort the SALT II negotiations. Carter chose not to risk SALT II. But his growing sensitivity to criticism was apparent from the increasingly strident tone of the

statements that now issued from the White House.

At the same time, it was also apparent that the administration remained divided about whether this region was in fact vital to U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf and West Asia. President Carter and some of his advisers believed that Bab-el-Mandeb, at the mouth of the Red Sea, was not really a key transit point of petroleum shipping and could not qualify any longer as a part of the oil jugular of the Western economies, since the oil tankers that had begun to ply the oil routes since the 1960s were too large to pass through the Suez Canal. This greatly reduced the strategic importance of the canal.²³ In this view, the real threat lay at the Straits of Hormuz, which connected the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea. Here the Soviet Union or any hostile state could direct a blockade not at the West or even Israel, but at Saudi Arabia. In that event, a blockade of the Bab-el-Mandeb straits would become a serious threat as it would hamper any military support to Jeddah. In 1976 and early 1977, U.S. strategists believed that the United States could rely on the French naval presence in Djibouti to keep it trouble-free. The French could operate from the island of Reunion, while the United States could rely upon the upgraded base at Diego Garcia as a springboard for a naval operation in the Indian Ocean.

On the other hand, the hawks in and out of the administration stressed the dangers of Soviet gains in the region and warned that a U.S. failure to counter them would be misunderstood in the Kremlin as weakness and acceptance of Soviet preeminence in the region.²⁴ This, they feared, would lead to the radicalization of the littoral states and give the Soviet Union the ability to close the straits of Bab-el-Mandeb, leaving the United States with no option but to respond militarily, at a time of Moscow's choosing, not of its own.

President Carter successfully resisted the advocacy of intervention, but he could not avoid making several concessions to his critics. In early 1978, the administration went on a verbal offensive over the entire range of Cuban and Soviet activities in Africa. Brzezinski warned that SALT was threatened by Soviet-Cuban incursions in the Horn of Africa, and on 16 February 1978, Carter declared that the United States would consider it a serious breach of peace, endangering even worldwide peace, if Cuban-supported Ethiopian troops should invade Somalia.

In a speech at the U.S. Naval Academy in June, President Carter declared, "the Soviet Union can choose either confrontation or cooperation. The U.S. is adequately prepared to meet either choice."²⁵ The Carter offensive was accompanied by several military measures. The aircraft carrier *Constellation* and a flotilla of escort ships from the Pacific

Fleet was dispatched to the Indian Ocean. Two U.S. AWACS (early radar warning and command planes) were sent from Okinawa to Saudi Arabia to carry out what the administration called "passive surveillance." A squadron of F-15 aircraft was also dispatched to Saudi Arabia, and the U.S. naval presence in the Indian Ocean was greatly reinforced.²⁶ The administration also stepped up its assistance to Somalia. These measures could not, however, determine the fortunes in the battle being waged on the ground. The Cuban-Soviet backed Ethiopian troops repelled the invading forces and inflicted heavy damage on Somali troops. At the defeat of U.S.-backed Somalia, the interventionists in and out of the administration began to demand immediate action, but President Carter was reluctant to get militarily involved.

The administration had good reasons for not committing U.S. forces to the region. First, given the Soviet airlifts of arms to Ethiopia and promises of more to come, a token U.S. commitment would not have changed the course of the battle. On the other hand, Carter did not think the U.S. public would countenance a large commitment of troops to a region not visibly vital to their interests. The memories of Vietnam were still strong. Third, he believed that arms negotiations with Moscow and agreement on the SALT were more important than winning one superpower contest in the Horn of Africa. Underlying this assessment was the Carter belief that a setback in Somalia was unlikely to threaten areas that were in fact important to the United States, i.e., the Persian Gulf and the Middle East.

Positions of Strength and Weakness

There were indeed sound reasons for this assumption. The U.S. position in Southwest Asia during 1977-1978 was, in fact, enviably strong. In contrast, Soviet influence was on the ebb: A look at the political alignment shows this. For instance, Soviet involvement in the Horn of Africa produced great strains in Iraq's relations with the USSR, because the latter supported Ethiopia. As a result, Iraq began moving more and more toward the West. Although Iraqi-American relations had not yet reached the point where formal diplomatic ties could be resumed, Moscow had every reason to be concerned over Carter's statement, made public on 11 June, that the United States would compete with the Kremlin for influence in Iraq.²⁷

Egypt had already moved completely out of the Soviet orbit, while the Saudis had begun playing an active role in weaning Arab capitals away from Moscow's anti-imperialist front. South Yemen, which had been allied very closely to the Soviet Union after the Marxist revolution, was enticed by Saudi offers of aid. Relations between the two were

restored in March 1976, and the Saudi cemented the ties by extending Aden \$100 million in grants. Similarly, another Soviet ally, Sudan, turned to Egypt and Saudi Arabia after a bloody Communist attempt to overthrow its government. Egypt was persuaded to enter a mutual defense pact in 1976 and to form a joint tripartite organization for close political, military, and economic cooperation among Sudan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. With Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, and Saudi Arabia in a tacit anti-Soviet front and Iraq and South Yemen edging away from Moscow, Ethiopia and Syria became its only remaining political allies in the region. And even Syria was bogged down in internecine warfare with the PLO, which had become a reluctant ally of the Soviet Union. Similarly, the activities of the Red Sea Entente had been highly advantageous to the United States. Informally organized, the Red Sea Entente consisted of pro-West, moderate states: Egypt, Iran, Sudan, Somalia, and Saudi Arabia. The main purpose of the entente was to actively oppose the spread of radicalism, whether of the Islamic or revolutionary variety. U.S. collaboration with the entente was, in fact, far wider than was generally acknowledged. This was based mainly on U.S. bilateral security and economic ties with the entente members. For instance, in support of his Camp David initiative and the Red Sea Entente, Carter sold Iran \$12 billion worth of arms, including AWACS, in his very first year in office. Early in 1978, he sent Congress a package deal that proposed selling Israel fifteen F-15's in addition to the twenty-five approved previously, plus seventy-five F-16's. To Egypt, he proposed to give fifty F-5E's, costing about \$400 million, and to Saudi Arabia, sixty F-15's, costing \$2.5 billion in all. A year later, in April 1978, Carter formally revealed a \$4.8 billion package of loans and grants, mostly for military equipment, for Egypt and Israel. This was the first time that the United States was willing to sell Egypt sophisticated arms and equipment. Although most of these weapons purchases were financed by Saudi Arabia, it was an indication of the U.S. commitment to Egypt and of the administration's confidence in Egypt's avowedly anti-Soviet posture.

The other countries, Morocco and Pakistan, were also coordinating their efforts with the Red Sea Entente. Entente members maintained close working ties with each other and shared the intelligence they gathered. Although the individual members had differences with Washington over specific issues, on the question of penetration of Soviet influence their interests converged. For instance, in early 1977, President Sadat offered to contribute troops to serve as a "fire-brigade" in Africa, particularly to counter the growing Soviet-Cuban influence south of the Sahara.²⁸ Similarly, the Shah of Iran feared that the overthrow of Haile Selassie and the rise of revolutionary forces in both

Ethiopia and South Yemen would jeopardize the stability of the states around the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. He was therefore willing to play the proxy for the United States and support with money and arms the anti-Soviet elements throughout the region.

In fact, the Soviet Union was so alarmed by the activities of the Red Sea Entente that in a major article in *Izvestia* Moscow lashed out at what it believed to be the main culprit. Quoting the French "bourgeois" paper *L'Aurore*, Moscow warned, "Riyadh directly or through other countries is attempting to draw such countries as Somalia and South Yemen into the conservative camp it heads." *Izvestia* further said,

the heightened interest Riyadh is showing in unification as an intermediary between certain Middle East states should be viewed in this light . . . the furor over the alleged threat to the security of the Red Sea region has not only an anti-Soviet motive, but also objectives of splitting the anti-imperialist unity of the Arab states and diverting their attention from the basic task . . . eliminating the consequences of Israeli aggression.²⁹

As far as Moscow was concerned, the Red Sea Entente activities directly threatened Soviet bases at Aden and Berbera, both considered crucial for the operation of Soviet naval forces in the Indian Ocean. It was in fact because of the Shah of Iran's financial and military urging that the Soviet Union was evicted from Berbera and Somalia had turned against Moscow. Although the advantages derived from entente activities were never publicized in Washington, President Carter had good reason to argue against those who claimed that the correlation of forces was tilting against the United States.

Indeed, his assessment of the overall strength of the U.S. position is independently corroborated. In a detailed study of Soviet policy in the Middle East, Robert Freedman concludes that

the USSR's inability to maintain its position in Somalia had substantial effect on its overall position in the Horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean. Even if the Ethiopian regime ultimately emerged victorious from all of its battles . . . the Soviets had suffered an immediate tactical defeat in the region with the departure of Soviet advisors from both the Sudan and Somalia in the space of six months and the loss of the Soviet bases in Somalia.

He further pointed to the reverses in Yemen and Iraq and observed that whatever success the USSR had in the Ethiopian airlifts, they were adequately countered by the strengthened strategic position of the United States. "Not only did the U.S. unquestionably have the largest and most formidable base in the region on Diego Garcia, but the overall geopolitical balance in the region had shifted against the Soviets."³⁰

President Carter could convincingly argue that the Somalian episode was not a significant setback for the United States, but he could hardly

characterize the events in 1979 in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan in the same light. As the Islamic revolution swept through Iran and Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan, every single liberal initiative he had espoused simply collapsed. The critics charged that the president had confused the allies of the United States, weakened its partners, and failed to choose wisely between friends and adversaries. We have already discussed this criticism in the context of the Arab-Israeli dispute and shown that Camp David was in fact a major gain for the United States. Were the critics right about Carter's failures in Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan? Was Carter handicapped by his emphasis on human rights? Did it encourage the revolutionaries in Teheran? Was Moscow emboldened by Carter's "weakness"? It is to these questions that we now turn.

Crisis in Iran, 1977-1978

The Carter administration, like its predecessors, believed that Iran was firmly under the Shah's control. Carter had visited Teheran at the end of 1977, and praised Iran as an island of stability. It was clear that almost no one in Washington had expected that, within a year and a half, revolution and collapse of the monarchy would totally alter the political map of the Persian Gulf. Throughout 1977 and early 1978, there were indications of growing discontent in Iran, but Washington had minimized their significance. U.S. intelligence assessments had concluded that there was no cause for concern. In their expert view, Iran was not in a revolutionary or even a prerevolutionary situation.³¹ They stressed that the Iranian military was loyal to the Shah and that the opposition did not have the power to be more than troublesome. But these assessments were wrong. The protest against the Shah's government began in early 1977 among university students.³² By autumn it had become clear that these were not the leftist students with whom the SAVAK was familiar, but an altogether different breed of protestors, for their revolts were clearly inspired by religion. In October 1977 there were large demonstrations on behalf of Seyyed Hashami, who had been sentenced to death for involvement in the assassination of other moderate clerics in Isfahan. In the same month, protest spread to the Majlis, the Iranian parliament. Still, at this point no one could have anticipated the events that were to follow. The Shah first attempted to split the opposition by co-opting moderate critics and using force against the extremists, but this strategy did not work.

In early 1978, the Shah reduced state disbursements to the clerics from \$80 million to \$30 million, hoping to bring them in line, but this had just the contrary effect. Similarly, when new taxes were imposed on the

bazzaris, they joined the mullahs, who had already mounted a large protest. In early January, *Elte la' at* published an attack on Khomeini. It was said to be inspired by the Shah. The newspaper article accused Khomeini of reactionary ideas, homosexuality, and ignorance. This, in fact, further consolidated the emerging anti-Shah front of students, bazzaris, and clerics. Violence and strikes spread to many religious centers, bazaars, and universities, culminating in the declaration of martial law in Isfahan in August 1978. Riots broke out in Abadan during mourning ceremonies for 430 persons who had died in a movie theater fire that people insisted had been set by SAVAK. In September, thousands marched through the streets of Abadan and hundreds clashed with and were jailed by the government. The protest now spread to Teheran, and the capital too came under martial law.

It was no longer possible to stem the tide of the revolution that was sweeping through Iran. In October, 40,000 Iranian petroleum workers went on strike, drastically reducing Iran's oil production. By November, the entire country was under martial law. December 1978 was a fateful month. Seventy percent of Iran's petroleum workers stayed off the job in response to Khomeini's call for a strike. The military government failed to restore law and order or establish any balance of control over the revolution. It was at this point that the Shah agreed to a provisional civilian government under his appointee Shahpur Bakhtiar, a member of the opposition National Front. But this did not appease the Islamic leadership. There were massive demonstrations, and the new government also subsequently collapsed. On 16 January, the Shah left Iran, ending once and for all two decades of monarchy and abandoning Teheran to the Islamic revolutionaries.

In retrospect, it is evident that Carter had four basic policy options from which to choose. The first was to offer total support for the Shah. This was Brzezinski's choice. He believed that the Soviet Union had a substantial role in developing the revolution. Based on this, Brzezinski had advocated a pro-Shah military coup during the Shah's last days in Teheran, but by then the military was already in the process of collapse. The second possibility was to help mediate a negotiated compromise involving some reduction in the Shah's power and the formation of a coalition government. Ambassador Sullivan and Secretary of State Vance had favored this alternative. In Chapter 1, we discussed the transitional plan that they had outlined. Third, Carter could oppose the Shah indirectly and perhaps aid in his removal. This was advocated by some in the State Department's Bureau of Human Rights. Fourth, there was the option to avoid a stand and take no action beyond protecting U.S. interests elsewhere in the Persian Gulf.

This last option was never seriously contemplated since to do nothing as a policy alternative is incompatible with the U.S. political climate. The lobby for the third option was the least influential of the four, although the critics have charged that insistence on human rights and lack of support from Carter was the main cause for the Shah's weakening and collapse.³³ In their view, the Carter administration did not understand that, although apparently anti-Communist, Islamic revolutionaries were even more anti-U.S. and therefore potentially an attractive ally for the Soviet Union. Finally, they believed that Carter jeopardized U.S. interests by emphasizing the liberal commitments of imperial power without sufficient regard for its responsibilities.

Carter does admit to having "privately" spoken to the Shah about the need for liberalization during their meeting in 1977, but the Shah was categorical in his reply. "No, there is nothing I can do," he said. "I must enforce the Iranian laws which are designed to combat communism. In any case, the complaints . . . originate among the very troublemakers against whom the laws have been designed. . . . They are really just a tiny minority and have no support among the vast majority of Iranian people."³⁴ Carter acknowledges that "it soon became obvious that my expression of concern would not change the policies of the Shah." After this, the administration dropped all references to human rights in its policy toward Iran and instead stepped up its support of the Shah. Ambassador Sullivan's account of his last two years in Teheran substantiates this. The Human Rights Bureau had no direct influence on decisions regarding Iran in this crisis period. The "mixed signals" that the Shah saw were most likely the result of routine requests for information regarding human rights that all embassies were required to make by law.

With the power rapidly slipping away from him and the country rising up in revolutionary protest, the Shah faced the classic king's dilemma; he was damned if he acted against popular sentiments and damned if he did not. President Carter faced a parallel problem. Military action would not succeed unless it was large-scale, well planned, and forceful. Even then, there was the danger that the United States could get bogged down in a situation from which it might not be able to withdraw easily. Then the critics would attack him even more vociferously. On the other hand, he could not withdraw American support of the Shah and begin negotiating a coalition government. The critics were already attacking him for not being forceful enough in the support of the Shah. And Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was suspicious that the administration was secretly trying to undermine him.³⁵ For Carter, it was clearly a no-win situation.

Nor was it possible to rally the Iranian armed forces against the revolution.³⁶ The Shah had not been able to do it. In fact, advocates of this approach hopelessly underestimated the depth of opposition to the Shah and the long list of popular grievances against him.

First, there was the rapidly growing opposition to the Shah's repressive, authoritarian rule, the brutalities of SAVAK, the rampant corruption of the Shah's family and, above all, the Shah's dependence on the United States. Second, his program of modernization had inflicted a heavy burden on a large segment of the urban and rural population, which had become restive and discontented. Iranian society was fast becoming polarized between a tiny modern segment on the one hand, and the vast majority of the poor on the other. This underclass was to play an important role in the revolution. The Iranian clergy was also unhappy at having lost their lands in the reforms.³⁷ According to Nikki Keddie, a widely acknowledged expert on Iran, the Shah's industrialization strategy had intimately linked indigenous big business with international capital. While this made available some consumer goods for the urban upper class, the majority of the poor urban class as well as the small entrepreneurs, the bazzaris, suffered heavily from inflation and taxes.³⁸ The revolution was therefore an expression of mass discontent caused by structural dislocation.

Nicholas Gage's eyewitness account of the revolution fully substantiates the above explanation of the social upheaval in Iran. He writes, "While the religious leaders became the spokesmen of the revolution, they were strongly supported by the bazzaris. . . . For centuries the wealthy merchants of the bazaar and the mullahs . . . have been mutually dependent . . . the mullahs were responsible for educating the sons of the bazzaris and in return, the bazzaris financed the clergy."³⁹ Thus, the revolution was brought about by a wide spectrum of classes who merged together in opposition to oppression and overdependence on the West.

The Shah had come to realize the implications of the protests and demonstrations long before the Carter administration did. In fact, the speed with which the Shah's armed forces became weakened and divided left him with no option but to leave the country. If the Iranian military could not be depended upon, any prolonged U.S. intervention would have inevitably turned into a military occupation. This was a commitment that no administration could make then—or, indeed, can make now.

Nonetheless, the spate of criticism and charges of failure leveled at Carter were driving him closer and closer to the military option. Carter had warned Iran that, if the hostages were punished or executed, he was prepared to launch a direct and immediate military attack on

Iran.⁴⁰ "We pored over aerial photographs of oil refineries and many other targets of strategic importance there," Carter says in his memoirs, and "planned how best to carry out our threat to the Iranian leaders of quick punitive action." He made sure that everyone was aware that "we were not bluffing and they knew it." The abortive rescue mission of April 1980 had been the unhappy consequence of this policy.

Pakistan Estranged

Whatever Jimmy Carter felt about the validity of his liberal internationalist policies, Iran had not been the main object of their thrusts. This could not be said of the administration's dealings with Pakistan, a country that constituted the easternmost edge of America's Southwest Asia perimeter.

In Carter's view, close security ties with Pakistan were not critical for the United States. He saw no vital American political or military interest at stake in Pakistan.⁴¹ This became evident in Carter's arms sales policy and in his insistence on nuclear nonproliferation and human rights in Pakistan.

The compromises in Carter's declaratory policies on arms to Iran have already been mentioned. Such compromises could, however, be justified in the case of Iran and Saudi Arabia since there was never any question about their importance to the United States. No such rationale was readily visible in the case of Pakistan, particularly as it was neither a source of oil nor critical to the protection of oil routes and shipping lanes.

In addition, until the end of 1978, the general political situation around Pakistan suggested no cause for alarm. True, the 1978 Saur revolution had altered the calculations there, but Afghanistan was never considered a U.S. responsibility. Kabul was a nonaligned government and, in Washington's eyes, by necessity pro-Soviet. Similarly, as shown earlier, President Carter had no clue about the damaging potential of the revolutionary situation in Iran. In the administration's judgment, the Shah appeared to be in control. What is more, President Carter wished to correct past U.S. mistakes in South Asia. For instance, both the Nixon and the Ford administrations had recognized India as the dominant power after 1971, but had effected no correspondingly appropriate changes in their policies. Although President Nixon had vowed to work through regionally influential states, he had neglected to explore India's potential as a partner in promoting U.S. influence in South Asia. Instead, the entire region was consigned to secondary status. India's pro-Moscow orientation did not overly concern President Carter, first because in 1977 and 1978 he did not believe Moscow to

be as expansionist as his critics claimed, and second because the defeat of Mrs. Gandhi (who was known to be pro-Moscow and cool toward the United States) and the advent of Janata rule in New Delhi (which desired closer ties with Washington) had created new opportunities in South Asia. In Pakistan, the civilian government of Zulfikar Bhutto had collapsed and a military coup in July 1977 had ushered in a military dictatorship under Zia-Ul-Huq.

Several writers have hinted at the Carter administration's possible complicity in the overthrow of Mr. Bhutto.⁴² They suggest that Washington had developed an intense dislike for Mr. Bhutto and his insistence on making Pakistan a nuclear power. The Carter administration, they claim, might not have discouraged the coup d'état of 1977. Whatever the truth in these allegations, the Carter administration's ties with Zia began to slide rapidly into bitter and angry confrontations.

Soon after the Martial Law Administration of President Zia was in place, it became clear that President Carter had reappraised the U.S. stake in South Asia and had decided to upgrade India's role in U.S. policy. Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher stated in July 1977 in New Delhi that Washington expected India to play a "leading" role in South Asia. As Tahir-Kheli points out, "His statement was . . . seen as conclusive proof that Washington had 'abandoned' Pakistan to the wolves, leading to a sense of isolation that was punctuated by reliance on Chinese friendship and recognition that the future of Pakistan lay with the conservative Arab states who alone could underwrite the costs of Pakistan's independence and security needs."⁴³ President Carter excluded Pakistan from his itinerary when at the end of 1978 he visited both Iran and India.

The thrust of Carter policies also became evident in his reluctance to sell arms to Pakistan. Early in his administration, President Carter had promised to reduce U.S. arms transfers and declared that he did not wish to make arms trade a major instrument of U.S. foreign policy. The administration claimed that the level and volume of arms sales to individual states were often at variance with their real needs, in addition to the fact that the United States gained no commensurate advantage from such sales. In keeping with this new stance, the Carter administration rejected the Pakistani request for 110 A-7 fighter aircraft. These had been previously offered by Henry Kissinger. The Carter administration argued that its rejection was based on the decision not to introduce sophisticated weapons systems in South Asia.⁴⁴ In place of A-7s, the administration was prepared to sell Pakistan A-4s and F-5s.

Pakistan countered the argument by pointing out that India had MIG-23's and was buying Jaguars from Great Britain. These acquisi-

tions were certain to leave Pakistan with no matching air defense. Pakistan therefore rejected the offer as a waste of money, and Washington formally withdrew the offer in June 1977. Pakistan was bitter about being made into an example of Carter's liberal policy initiatives.

Perhaps to return the U.S.-Pakistani ties to some level of amicability, in November 1978 Carter once again offered Pakistan seventy F-5s as a sign of goodwill. The Pakistanis, however, suspected this gesture as a ploy to dissuade them from exercising the nuclear option. The earlier overture, therefore, came to nothing. The administration argued that its offers of arms were commensurate with Pakistan's requirements, while Zia insisted that the proposed arms packages were composed of obsolete and aging weapons systems that could not even begin to meet the Pakistani need.

In line with its nuclear nonproliferation policy, the Carter administration came down hard on various Pakistani efforts to buy or acquire nuclear technology. When Pakistan still refused to forgo its nuclear option and continued to seek nuclear technology and parts abroad, the Congress, at the behest of President Carter, applied the Symington-Glenn Amendment to the International Security Assistance Act of 1977 and terminated all security assistance to Pakistan in April 1979. Pakistan did not see the Carter objections to the Pakistani nuclear program as a bid to prevent the spread of nuclear technology in the world. For Pakistan, Carter's objections were highly suspect since the administration had continued to supply India with U.S. nuclear fuel.

Last but not least, the administration's frequent admonitions on human rights violations irritated Pakistan. Zia had repeatedly postponed elections, banished the political parties, banned the press, and jailed hundreds throughout Pakistan. The indefinite postponement of elections by the martial law authorities in October 1979 was the last straw that broke the back of the U.S.-Pakistani ties. Carter expressed his unhappiness in no uncertain terms.

The Afghan Crisis

This was then the state of the U.S.-Pakistan relations on the eve of the Soviet march into Afghanistan. During 1978 and early 1979, while Carter policies were causing great disappointment in Islamabad, Zia had tried to draw Washington's attention to the events in Afghanistan—the unification of the rival left factions and the Saur revolution. However, President Carter, as we have pointed out earlier, was not overly worried. He was convinced that it was not in the interests of the Soviet Union to destabilize the area.

In this he was obviously wrong. Whether the Afghan invasion was motivated by a desire to control Persian Gulf oil, as a large number of experts claimed at that time, or whether it was merely a defensive operation, it undoubtedly altered the entire political and strategic calculations in the region. President Carter had been highly remiss in not following more closely the course of events in Afghanistan. It is obvious from Carter's account that, although the revolution of April 1978 had installed a Communist government in Kabul, he did not consider Taraki such a hard-line pro-Soviet Communist as some in the U.S. press had characterized him. In any case, the revolution appeared quite genuine.

Indeed, there were good reasons for this supposition.⁴⁵ In his early pronouncements, Taraki denied that his regime was Communist. He asserted that his goal was a "national democratic" revolution. Although the first claim was not credible, the second was partly borne out by the regime's moderate programs of social and economic reform. In foreign affairs, the Taraki government appeared keen to adhere to the Afghan policies of the past, i.e., nonalignment. On 6 May 1978, Taraki declared that his government was "trying to maintain friendly relations with the U.S." and added that this would depend on "the amount of economic and political support the revolutionary government received."⁴⁶ As to the new government's relations with Moscow, even the *London Times* of 29 May 1978 commented that it may be even more nationalist and independent than the government of Daoud.

Nor was Afghanistan an area of vital importance to the United States. Iran and the Camp David negotiations had Carter's full attention throughout 1978 and early 1979. Therefore, not until May 1979 did he become aware of the dangers of growing Soviet involvement in Kabul. The administration admonished and warned Moscow against intervention, but it was clear that Afghanistan was still almost at the bottom of its priorities. This was not in any way a departure from previous policy, much less an abdication of responsibility, since all postwar administrations had given Afghanistan no more than passing attention. Thus, during the Nixon presidency, the Shah of Iran had been the primary influence in Kabul. He had weaned Daoud away from a pro-Moscow position with offers of \$2 billion in aid, a sum far surpassing Soviet pledges to the Afghan seven-year plan (1976-1983).⁴⁷ In return, the Shah was allowed to operate a SAVAK station in Kabul to help Daoud root out the "Communists." At Teheran's urging, Daoud even agreed to drop his militant support of the Baluchi and Pushtun tribes and sought a peaceful solution to the border problem with Pakistan.

In other words, both Afghanistan and Pakistan were being increasingly drawn into the Iran-Saudi orbit prior to April 1978. This could only benefit the United States. In fact, Daoud's move toward the West was to culminate in a meeting with Carter in September 1978, but before that could happen he was killed in the confrontation between the government and the newly united Communist party (consisting of both the Parcham and Khalq factions), and Taraki emerged as the new president of Afghanistan.

It is hard to say whether the United States could have prevented this in any way. Subsequent events, the growing turmoil in Afghanistan, and the Soviet invasion of December 1979, have in fact obscured from view the question of why President Carter did not contemplate more drastic measures in 1978. First, the 1978 Saur Revolution took everyone by surprise, including the Soviet Union. A majority at the time believed that the coup had not been a planned, long-awaited Soviet game plan as some were suggesting. Louis Dupree, a leading expert on Afghanistan, stressed the makeshift and haphazard nature of the revolution. Second, there was no public support for U.S. military intervention. The 1978 coup in fact went largely unnoticed. Third, the administration was aware that the Soviets had a special interest in Afghanistan and over the past two decades had developed enormous influence and close links with the Afghan ruling elite. Fourth, since a military confrontation with Moscow over Afghanistan was ruled out, Washington might influence events by providing arms and support for antigovernment Afghan insurgents. But here again, the U.S. hand remained stymied: There was hardly any popular opposition to the Saur Revolution. Mass uprisings and significant rebel activities did not emerge until mid-1979. By that time, the United States was fully occupied with events in Iran. In any event, the Soviet invasion finally put an end to Carter's liberal internationalist convictions.

The Soviet move immediately galvanized the Carter administration into frenetic activity. Carter offered Pakistan a package of \$400 million in economic and military assistance and sent his aides to the Congress to canvass for its approval. The A-7 Skyhawk deal was revived, and the Pentagon began to draw up munitions lists for Pakistan. But, at the same time, Carter sought to reassure India that this represented no change in overall U.S. policy toward the South Asian subcontinent. Zia, however, rejected the offer as totally inadequate.

Carter tried to allay Zia's fears by reaffirming the 1959 agreement of cooperation with Pakistan. But Zia insisted on a formal treaty. This, he reasoned, would end once and for all the United States' ambivalence and attempts to balance its moves toward Pakistan against their reper-

cussions in India. The United States remained reluctant for precisely this same reason. On arms also, the two remained very far apart. Pakistan produced a list of weapons that added up to nearly \$11 billion. Since the U.S. intention was not to rearm Pakistan so that it would become a formidable military power, but merely to address the immediate threat, no further progress could be made on this question. In any case, it was obvious to all, including Zia, that Carter was fast losing popularity at home and that the hostage crisis, unless resolved soon, could very well cost him the presidency. There was no point in negotiating with a president who was on his way out. Additionally, Zia was gaining wide sympathy and support among the rapidly growing number of hawks and hard-liners both in and out of the administration. He must have felt confident about receiving a favorable hearing at a later point, and he was right.

The Carter Years Assessed

By the end of its term in office, the Carter administration was overwhelmed by charges of indecisiveness, vacillation, and failure, but a closer examination reveals that in Southwest Asia as a whole Carter's performance should be judged as mixed: not wholly a failure, nor wholly a success.

In the Camp David agreement, Carter had established a structure of peace in the region. To that extent he had established a basis for enhanced U.S. presence there. But here the United States was more a mediator and an agent of peace rather than a biased supporter of Israel. The Carter administration had stepped up and strengthened the U.S. strategic infrastructure by building stockpiles of arms in Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Somalia, and, of course, Diego Garcia. As is evident in the activities of the Red Sea Entente, the United States successfully used regional powers to counter Soviet influence and bolster U.S. interests. In this regard, the Carter administration had continued the basic thrusts of the foreign policy implemented during the Nixon-Ford-Kissinger years.

The institutionalization of Egypt's pro-West moderate stance in the Camp David agreements was in fact Carter's major achievement. According to one leading expert, "The new Egyptian orientation has outweighed even the importance of the Iranian revolution, and its benefits have continued beyond Egypt's partial excommunication by those Arab states that oppose the Camp David agreements."

President Carter had refused to be drawn into the crisis in the Horn of Africa, which in any case had only dubious connections with alleged

Soviet designs over Saudi Arabia. This refusal was held up as a grave error of judgment by critics. But in retrospect, the Soviet Union's activities have not enhanced its position there or in Africa. If anything, the cynical flip-flop of commitment in the Horn of Africa has greatly hurt Moscow's standing among its clients in the Arab world.

There is no consensus among critics as to why Carter "failed" in Iran. A major line of criticism focused on Carter's moralistic foreign policy conception and lack of adequate knowledge of Iran. Over the passage of the last few years there has been considerable rethinking on this issue, but at the time, Carter's human rights policies were held to be the major cause for U.S. failures. The advocates of this argument contend that the Shah did not use force because he feared that, if he did, the administration would withdraw support. Against this contention it should be pointed out that Carter could not be held responsible for the Shah's apathy or failures to use force. Indeed, the incident at Jaleh Square in September 1978 shows that force had been used but had failed to intimidate the protestors, who were soon back in the streets. Iranian military officers were also reluctant to confront the revolutionaries. The failure of the Bakhtiar government—which had been one last attempt by the Shah to retain some control—and the division within the armed forces on the question of compromise with the revolutionary leadership, led one to conclude that the military option Carter's critics thought so appropriate was not available before 16 January 1979.

A second line of criticism perceives U.S. "failures" in terms of personality clashes in Washington, tactical mistakes, lack of information, and indecisiveness, but not as a failure to resist the momentum of secular historical forces. To put it simply, in this view, the Iranian revolution was not a genuinely popular movement. Recent research has revealed this indeed to be the case.

The question still remains as to whether President Carter could have done something to better prepare the United States to bear the consequences of the revolution. This issue has two dimensions; the first revolves around developing a better-informed, coherent, firm response, while the second turns on the adequacy of Carter's measures after the hostage crisis. In regard to the first, the assumption that better knowledge about the internal politics, culture, and ideological orientation of a region will automatically enable the United States to make the correct response is indeed debatable. The kind of information that might be available and the sorts of decisions Washington is called upon to make might have very little connection. To "know" that Islamic fundamentalism is a dangerous enemy does not empower a president to stop it. In addition, it must be pointed out that the "information" and

"knowledge" the White House receives is often ambiguous and even contradictory.

Many critics often overlook yet another factor that is decisive in the formulation of U.S. policy. This is that U.S. policy goals (moralistic or *realpolitik*) and the U.S. choice of options are conditioned by the balance of political forces within the United States. Even if Carter had been convinced of the soundness of Ambassador Sullivan's advice to open negotiations with Khomeini, while the Shah was still on the throne, such a move was politically impossible. It would have brought angry denunciations from a majority in and out of the administration. The imperatives of political survival often dictate a course of policy that might result in eventual failure, but in the context of politics such a choice is still arguably wise. Indeed the United States is no stranger to this dilemma.

On balance, there was not much President Carter could have done to stem the tide of revolution in Iran. Nor could he have done much after the revolutionaries took U.S. citizens as hostages. It is therefore unfair to accuse Carter of deliberately weakening the position of the United States in the Persian Gulf, or to suggest that such weakening emboldened Moscow to invade Afghanistan.

In fact, it has been pointed out that on the part of Moscow the invasion of Afghanistan was a protective move. After the hostage crisis in November 1979, Moscow was convinced that the United States might be preparing to intervene and might at the same time move against the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul.

As to Afghanistan, U.S. interests there had been only peripheral. On the other hand, Soviet proximity and Soviet policy had given Moscow immense advantages. Carter did not think it appropriate to plunge the United States into an armed confrontation with the Soviets over their activities there. There was very little support for such a move.

In this sense, however, his policies toward Pakistan were somewhat shortsighted. Insofar as India did not serve U.S. strategic interests and Pakistan did, the Carter diplomacy toward Islamabad was unnecessarily heavyhanded. But on the other hand, it is doubtful whether a greater commitment to Pakistan would have deterred the Soviets from invading Afghanistan. It would only have blocked improvement in relations with India.

On balance, the failures of Carter's policies were failures of timing and manner of diplomacy rather than of basic thrust. However, Carter never had the time to carry his thinking to its logical conclusion. The rising clamor for more combative, militaristic measures undermined all that had been proposed. Carter did not fail to balance the responsibility of imperial power with its liberal commitments; he sought to

temper the first with the second, and failed mainly because the crises that were beyond his control destroyed the immediate logic of his policies, and the rise of hawkish sentiments undermined their rationale. Carter's greatest failures were not so much conceptual, but political. He failed to convince the U.S. public and preserve intact its support for his global initiatives.

What caused the popular tide to turn against Carter? It is to this we turn in the next chapter.

Notes

1. Stanley Hoffman, *Primacy on World Order* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 93.

2. For a discussion of the Trilateralist strategy of global interdependence, see Richard Cooper, "A New International Order for Mutual Gain," *Foreign Policy* 26 (Spring 1977); Fred Bergstern, "The Threat from the Third World," *Foreign Policy* 11 (Summer 1973); 2. Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Trilateral Relations in a Global Context," *Dialogue* 7 (Summer 1975).

3. Reported in the *New York Times*, 6 January 1978.

4. The PRM 10 conclusion contradicted the findings of Team B, appointed by President Ford. The team had warned of a continuing Soviet military buildup.

5. For elaboration of these notions, see Tom Farer, "The U.S. and the Third World," *Foreign Affairs* 48 (October 1975).

6. The focus on human rights and Carter's criticism of Soviet treatment of its dissidents angered Moscow. Brezhnev warned Carter not to interfere in the Soviet Union's internal affairs. See *Pravda*, 22 March 1977.

7. Speech of Vice-President Walter F. Mondale to the World Council of Northern California, 17 June 1977.

8. *Department of State Bulletin* 76 (30 May 1977), 547.

9. These are succinctly described by Steven Spiegel, "Does the United States Have Options in the Middle East," *Orbis* 24 (Summer 1980), 399-400.

10. *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 13 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 21 March 1977), 361.

11. The Carter administration argued that Israel could not have both territory and peace. A smaller Israel would ensure Middle East stability, and a stable Middle East would prevent an adverse linkage between oil and Arab-Israeli conflict. See Brzezinski, "Recognizing the Crisis," *Foreign Policy* 5 (Winter 1974-1975), 67.

12. *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 13 (16 March 1977), 361.

13. *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 13 (26 September 1977), 1378.

14. Quoted in *Washington Post*, 25 May 1977.

15. Carter hoped that the election of Prime Minister Begin would "not be a step backward" in the achievement of peace. Quoted in *Washington Post*, 22 May 1977.