DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 314 766 CS 506 914

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TITLE "A New Foreign Policy": President Jimmy Carter's Speech at Notre Dame, May 22, 1977. A Paper Presented in Honor of Everett Lee Hunt.
PUB DATE 20 Nov 89
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (75th, San Francisco, CA, November 18-21, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Historical Materials (060)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audience Response; *Civil Liberties; Communism; Discourse Analysis; *Foreign Policy; Humanitarianism; Ideology; *Persuasive Discourse; *Political Attitudes; Politics; Public Opinion; Public Speaking; *Rhetorical Criticism
IDENTIFIERS *Carter (Jimmy); Carter Administration

ABSTRACT

An analysis of the content and a critique of the significance of President Jimmy Carter's 1977 commencement speech at the University of Notre Dame, show that technical weaknesses such as poor organization, inconsistent style, and overbreadth limited its intended effect. Carter had hoped that this speech would dispel confusion over some of his foreign policy decisions and would change the motivating principle of United States foreign policy from a negative one (anti-communism) to a positive one (supporting human rights). Instead, the news media found the speech to be ambiguous as to Carter's foreign policy intentions and questioned how his commitment to human rights--which they found praiseworthy--could be transformed from theory into practice. The speech differed from others by Carter in that it was a broad statement of policy rather than an addresss on specific measures, and Carter worked more closely with his speech writers and gave more attention to the effectiveness of the speech than usual. While the speech did not have the effect intended by Carter, it did cause foreign policy discussions to be reshaped even into the Ronald Reagan years. (Twenty-six footnotes are included.) (MHC)

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"A NEW FOREIGN POLICY"

PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER'S SPEECH AT NOTRE DAME

MAY 22, 1977

A PAPER PRESENTED IN HONOR OF EVERETT LEE HUNT

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University of Pittsburgh

Presented at the Speech Communication Association

Annual Convention

November 20, 1989

Hilton Hotel

San Francisco, California

CS506914

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A NOTE ON EVERETT LEE HUNT

Everett Lee Hunt (1890-1984) is best known in our profession as the author of the seminal study, "Plato and Aristotle on Rhetoric and Rhetoricians," published in 1924. His professional reputation rests so heavily on that long essay that it is hardly known that he was primarily interested in current issues and contemporary problems, especially--as he used to say--if "they had a touch of philosophy about them."

In 1913 his Huron College yearbook described him as one who had "made himself notorious within recent months by superseding Lundberg as the local exponent of Socialism." He later edited a volume of essays and speeches that he entitled Persistent Questions for Public Discussion. And he remained an ardent Democrat throughout his life. In retirement, he read the New York Times for political news each morning and watched the MacNeil-Lehrer Report each evening. He was deeply inerested in political issues, and as a Quaker, the issue of war and peace had special meaning to him.

Everett gained prominence early in his career for his championing of ideas over techniques in the teaching of public speaking. And his preference for studying the substance of speeches to the almost total neglect of theory or technique remained a stubborn preference throughout his life.

It is in this spirit that the following paper is delivered in honor of my friend, Everett Hunt.

"A NEW FOREIGN POLICY"

PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER'S SPEECH AT NOTRE DAME

MAY 22, 1977

Theodore Otto Windt, Jr.

President Jimmy Carter entered the White House in January, 1977 confident that the world had changed and was not only prepared, but anxious for a new American foreign policy, one that would be "based on constant decency in [our] values and an optimism in our historical vision."[1] He asserted that human rights were central to this foreign policy. The centrality of human rights in foreign policy regardless of national boundaries or standing alliances would form a new approach and thus "would restore to American policy a popular base of support at home, burnish the tarnished national prestige abroad, and align the United States with the irresistible forces of liberty and progress everywhere."[2] Such idealistic themes struck a responsive note in the American electorate even if it was skeptical about how they would be transformed into policy and how they could be applied to specific foreign policy problems.

Once safely in the White House, Carter made it clear that he meant what he said about human rights. During the first week of his administration the State Department warned the Soviet Union about attempting to intimidate Andrei Sakharov, the principal Soviet dissident, by stating that further attempt to harass him

would "conflict with accepted international standards of human rights."[3] Even though Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador, protested the statement, the President stood by the State Department and later in February sent his celebrated letter to Sakharov praising him for his commitment to human rights in the face of continued official harassment.

The initial effects of the human rights campaign during the first six months of the new administration was both to anger Soviet leaders and to put them on the defensive in the overall propaganda war with the Western Alliance. But it had other effects when applied to other countries, especially our traditional allies. When Carter criticized West Germany for selling nuclear fuel to Brazil and criticized Brazil for buying it, both nations were offended. When Carter suggested that he would support a homeland for the Palestinians, the Israeli were angered. At home, he received criticism for approving the entrance of Vietnam into the United Nations and for hinting that he would normalize relations with Cuba. Serious questions arose. How could an American President approve the admission of Vietnam, our recent enemy to the United Nations, and still support human rights? Why criticize our traditional allies while suggesting rapprochement with a traditional adversary?

Sensing this confusion, Carter went before the General Assembly of the United Nations on March 17, 1977 to present the broad outlines of his new foreign policy. In this address, he cited three major foreign policy goals: slowing the arms race, encouraging economic cooperation among nations, and protecting

human rights. On this last issue, Carter stated: "No member of the United Nations can claim that mistreatment of its citizens is solely its own business. Equally, no member can avoid its responsibilities to review and to speak when torture or unwarranted deprivation of freedom occurs in any part of the world."[4] What Carter seemed to be saying was that the era of American military intervention in other nations was over, but only to be replaced by a moral rhetorical intervention based on human rights.

But the thrust of the speech was overshadowed by Carter's decision to outline the objectives of his comprehensive SALT II proposals on this, the eve of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's trip to Moscow to begin negotiating the new treaty. As Vance noted: "Until then both sides, at least in public statements, had adhered to the confidentiality of the negotiations. This had helped insulate the talks from excessive political or ideological posturing. The administration's 'openness' violated that canon of the SALT process and may have contributed to Moscow's suspicions."[5] It did more than contribute to Moscow's suspicions. It probably doomed them altogether. The Soviet leadership rejected the proposals out of hand, denounced the United States for its own violations of human rights, and then broke off the talks three days after Vance's arrival. The Moscow trip ended as a fiasco. And the result in the United States was, as Vance noted, attacks on "our human rights policy and calling us 'naive' and inconsistent."[6] For the next month the confusion intensified and resulted in a decision by the President to give a

major address making clear the country's new priorities and policies under the Carter administration. They chose the University of Notre Dame and May 22 as the time and site for the address.

PREPARATION FOR THE ADDRESS

President Carter's speech at Notre Dame was unique in three ways. First, it was to be a broad and comprehensive speech on foreign policy, his "grand design" for the future--as James Fallows, his chief speech writer called it.[7] This rhetorical approach was quite different from other Carter speeches that were much more focused on specific policies rather than broad outlines of principles. Indeed, Carter's rhetorical forte was discussing specific issues especially in press conferences, not the giving of major speeches dealing with sweeping declarations of political philosophy. But this speech was different. Among the speech writers there was a sense that they were creating Carter's equivalent of John F. Kennedy's eloquent address at American University in 1963, and Fallows remembers references to Kennedy's speech as they were writing.[8]

Because Carter attached so much importance to this speech, it was unique in a second respect. Carter worked more closely with his speech writers on this one than any other speech during the time Fallows was in the White House. The President's relationship with speech writers was generally distant. Usually, the President called Fallows in and listed the points he wanted

to make and then directed him to the policy people who could fill him in on the substance and details of policy. Drafts would be written and exchanged among the writers, the policy people, the political advisers, and the President. The writers did not sit down with the President and thrash out the politics of the speech or the policy ramifications. In the Carter White House, speech writers were "wordsmiths" and stylists with little influence on policy or politics. Indeed, this was the reason Fallows gave for leaving the administration after three years.[9]

But again this speech was different. Carter worked more closely with the writers than on any other speech. Fallows recalled that the President wanted the speech to be eloquent, and particular attention was given to style.[10]

Finally, the speech was unique because the President gave it special attention. Fallows stated that generally Carter "didn't think it important to give effective speeches."[11] Carter seemed to think that deeds were more significant than words. Indeed, during the early days of the administration, Carter and his advisers seemed to have been surprised that public statements had enormous impact. In talking about the human rights campaign during this time, Hamilton Jordan said these "might be the best example of how we had not fully appreciated the significance of public statements by the President on international affairs."[12] But for this occasion they did, and that attitude found moving expression in the address when Carter stated:

> I understand fully the limits of moral suasion. We have no illusion that changes will come easily or soon. But I also believe that it is a mistake to undervalue the power of words and of ideas that words

embody. In our own history, that power has ranged from Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream."

In the life of the human spirit, words are action, much more so than many of us may realize who live in countries where freedom of expression is taken for granted. The leaders of totalitarian nations understand this very well. The proof is that words are precisely the action for which dissidents in those countries are being persecuted.

And so the words for this address were to end confusion about his administration and to point to new assumptions and new directions for American foreign policy.

THE ADDRESS AT NOTRE DAME

On May 22, 1977 President Carter addressed the graduates of Notre Dame University. It was an appropriate and symbolic setting. Father Hesburgh, the President of the University, was well-known for his support of human rights and for his founding of the Notre Dame Center for Civil Rights, both of which Carter praised in his speech. Furthermore, only a month before the Center had sponsored a conference on human rights and American foreign policy, the central theme of the President's address.

Surveying the world, Carter stated:

> In less than a generation, we've seen the world change dramatically. The daily lives and aspirations of most human beings have been transformed. Colonialism is nearly gone. A new sense of national identity now exists in almost 100 new countries that have been formed in the last generation. Knowledge has become more widespread; aspirations are higher. As more people have been freed from traditional constraints, more have been determined to achieve for the first time in their lives social justice.

Within this changing world, the United States must also change. "For too many years," Carter stated, "we've been willing to adopt

the flawed and erroneous principles and tactics of our adversaries, sometimes abandoning our own values for theirs." The Vietnam war was the "best example" of the "intellectual and moral poverty" of these principles and tactics. American policy during this time was guided by two principles:

> a belief that Soviet expansion was almost inevitable but that it must be contained, and the corresponding belief in the importance of an almost exclusive alliance among non-Communist nations on both sides of the Atlantic. That system could not last forever unchanged. Historical trends have weakened its foundation. The unifying threat of conflict with the Soviet Union has become less intensive even though the competition has become more extensive.
>
> The Vietnamese war produced a profound moral crisis sapping worldwide faith in our own policy and our system of life, a crisis of confidence made even more gave by the covert pessimism of some of our leaders.

But now the world had changed. In a phrase that would cause considerable criticism from his opponents and would later come back to haunt him, Carter stated that "we are now free of that inordinate fear of communism which once led us to embrace any dictator who joined us in that fear." (Emphasis added.)

A new world was in the making that required a new foreign policy to shape it, "a policy based on constant decency in values and on optimism in our historical vision." Carter's new foreign policy would be based on "five cardinal principles." The main sections of the speech listed and elaborated on these five principles.

First, of course, human rights: "[W]e have reaffirmed America's commitment to human rights as a fundamental tenet of our foreign policy." This was the centerpiece of the Carter foreign policy and it is reaffirmed in the most moving section of

his address. America had been founded on human rights, Carter said, and those rights continue to unite Americans despite the diversity of their religious, cultural, and racial backgrounds. It was a principle to which Carter was fully committed, and one which he believed ought to replace anti-communism as the guiding principle of his new foreign policy. As Raymond L. Garthoff noted, the emphasis on human rights was in part "a return to Wilsonian idealism after the realism of the Kissinger conception of detente."[13] However, there was little that was new in this section. Carter had been talking about human rights ever since he began running for the presidency. Even though it was early in his administration and even though this was the most elegant phrasing of his belief in human rights, the topic was old hat, one he had spoken about repeatedly.

Second: "[W]e've moved deliberately to reinforce the bonds among our democracies." This statement seems like one of the standard platitudes of American political rhetoric. It seems banal because in previous decades the word "democracy" had become so devalued. In their search to create world-wide alliances to combat communism, previous policy-makers had allied the United States with countries that hardly could be characterized as democratic. And Americans had fought and lost a recent war to defend a country that systematically denied such rights to its own citizens.

But for Carter this principle was no empty platitude, even though he did not spell out its policy implications in the speech. Democracy had a concrete meaning to Carter and that

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meaning was found in the institutionalized protection governments gave to the human rights for their citizens. It was with those countries that the democratic bonds would be reinforced.

Even more important, Carter was embracing Brzezinski's concept of trilaterialism, a global partnership among the world's leading democracies of Western Europe, Japan and the United States acting in concert to meet global problems.[14] Instead of acting unilaterally as previous administrations had to protect what they perceived as American national interests, the United States would now act in partnership with other democracies to meet challenges in the world. As Stanley Hoffman noted: "The Carter administration understood that, in an era marked by the diffusion of power to new actors insistent on asserting themselves and on rejecting the dependencies fashioned by colonialism or by long economic subordination to more advanced nations, the conditions for U.S. influence had changed."[15] World leadership required interdependent, rather than unilateral, action.

Tying human rights to this new interdependence meant a change in the challenges faced by democracies. Most important was the change in the major adversary. No longer was it communism, but totalitarian states; no longer solely a challenge from the ideological left, but from those totalitarian nations--both right and left of which communist countries were only one part--that denied human rights to their citizens. Such a shift represented an entirely new perspective on foreign policy. To develop this topic fully and clearly would have required an

entirely different kind of speech from the one Carter delivered.

Therefore, the President did not amplify this principle in the speech. It was too politically dangerous. It could be interpreted, as it was by the Committee on the Present Danger, as a retreat from leadership, as an abdication of power, as a naive analysis of the Soviet threat.[16] So instead, the President limited his discussion of this principle to issues of increasing economic cooperation, promoting free trade, strengthening the world's monetary system, and seeking ways of avoiding nuclear proliferation, all less controversial and more acceptable initiatives. Nonetheless, for sophisticated observers of foreign policy, this section of the address was the most telling. But it could not be appreciated without a knowledge of his previous pronouncements or an understanding of the overall thinking that drove administration policies. Thus, a section that truly represented an original formulation of a new conception and new conditions for leadership in the world sounded, for all intents and purposes, like a tired litany of political platitudes.

The final three "principles" presented by Carter were hardly principles. They were a mixture of reports on what the administration was doing or what it hoped to achieve rather than an exposition of basic assumptions underlying the new foreign policy.

As his third cardinal principle, the President said "we've moved to engage the Soviet Union in a joint effort to halt the strategic arms race." THe import of this topic was that it signaled increased attempts to move forward the stalled SALT

discussions. For his fourth principle he moved to the problem in the Middle East: "[W]e are taking deliberate steps to improve the chances of lasting peace in the Middle East" through "wide-ranging consultation with the leaders of countries involved." For the general public all this seemed to mean was a continuation of the Kissinger policy of "shuttle diplomacy." And finally, "we are attempting . . . to reduce the danger of nuclear proliferation and the world-wide spread of conventional weapons." Each of these final three related in one way or another to the major principle guiding Carter's new foreign policy, but as principles of that policy they are rhetorically tepid in comparison, even as Carter's subsequent involvement in the Middle East negotiations would become the major achievement of his administration.

The final long section of his address is diffused as the President sought to touch on a number of other topics relating to foreign policy. He noted that expanded trade must reach out to the developing countries because "a peaceful world cannot long exist one-third rich and two-thirds hungry." He cited a "special need" for greater cooperation with other nations in the Western Hemisphere. Such brief comments added to the comprehensiveness of foreign policy, but diluted the effect of his effort.

The most striking anomaly in this section was a three sentence paragraph dealing with the People's Republic of China:

> It's important that we make progress toward normalizing relations with the People's Republic of China. We see the American Chinese relationship as a central element of our global policy, and China as a key force for global peace. We wish to cooperate closely with the creative Chinese people on the problems that confront all mankind, and we

hope to find a formula which can bridge some of the difficulties that still separate us.

This paragraph seems so out of place both in terms of the structure of the speech and importance of the statement. If the Sino-American relationship was indeed seen as a "central element of our global policy," should not it have been presented as one of the cardinal principles of the new foreign policy? Conventional rhetorical wisdom would say so. And yet, it is buried near the end of the speech. When I asked Fallows about it, he could not remember why it was placed in this part of the speech. Possibly, he said, it was inserted into the speech by one of Carter's major policy advisers, most probably Brzezinski.[17] Undoubtedly, it was inserted so as not to offend the Chinese by talking about American foreign policy and global problems without mentioning their role in being included in that new policy or in contributing to the resolution of international problems. In addition, it did signal the Chinese that the United States was willing to extend full recognition to the People's Republic, which actually would occur after the mid-term election in December, 1978.

On the other hand, this reference to the People's Republic was probably buried deep in the speech so as not to offend the Soviets. The tensions between the two communist superpowers had grown during this time, and the suspicion among Soviet leaders that the United States was attempting to form alliances to encircle the Soviet Union could only be intensified by giving prominence to a closer American relationship with the Chinese. Furthermore, the administration had only recently been able to

reestablish a basis for SALT negotiations with the Soviet Union. The administration would not want an indiscreet emphasis given to the Chinese. Such is the delicate nature of modern political speeches and speech writing. Conventional rhetorical wisdom must give way to the pragmatics of public policy and political realities.

CRITIQUE OF THE SPEECH AND ITS EFFECTS

What can the critic say of this presidential address that was to present a blueprint for the future of American foreign policy? No doubt the speech presented the President's thinking at that time in the comprehensive way in which he wanted it presented. But the speech contained serious technical weaknesses that limited its intended effect. The five "cardinal principles" were inconsistent as principles. Human rights was certainly a lofty principle but the other four were diminishing in elegance and in importance as principles. Thus, the speech ran downhill in rhetorical force after the section on human rights.

The insertion of the reference to the People's Republic of China seemed quite out of place buried near the end, both in terms of the organization of the speech and in terms of the significance attached to the role of China in world affairs. Given the meticulously careful way in which that paragraph is written, one can readily believe that it was originally composed by a policy adviser rather than a speech writer. Indeed, the overall style of the speech is inconsistent. The early sections

of the speech, especially those dealing with human rights, are occasionally written with elegance even if they do not ascend to eloquence. But the other topics of the speech do not lend themselves to such expressive phrasing nor do they have it. In addition, the inclusion of a homey joke near the beginning of the speech contrasts unfavorably with the lofty sentiments about human rights. In this stylistic sense, Carter's effort compares unfavorably with Kennedy's address at American University which was written in a consistently grand style. But if style is the person, this speech reflects Carter the President for it contains rhetorical glimpses of Carter the Common Man, Carter the idealistic president, and Carter the policy technician. And as with his administration as well as in the speech, these three did not mesh easily or comfortably.

President Carter also attempted to cover too many diverse topics in a single address. Any one of his "five cardinal principles" as well as his brief remarks about China could have provided ample material for a single important speech, and one or two of these topics probably deserved such extended treatment. One can understand that the President wanted a comprehensive statement that would draw all these diverse issues and principles together so as to replace confusion with clarity about his direction in creating a new foreign policy. But they did not relate to one another as convincingly as they should to have to achieve a cogent and moving effect. Rather a study of the speech gives force to Fallows' assessment of Carter: "He holds explicit, thorough positions on every issue under the sun, but he

has no large view of the relations between them, no line indicating which goals . . . will take precedence over which . .? Spelling out these choices makes the difference between a position and a philosophy, but it is an act foreign to Carter's mind."[18]

There are usually three general audiences for a presidential speech. And each can be subdivided into partisans and those with particular interests in what the President has to say. These three audiences are: (1) the mass audience (primarily the general public); (2) an attentive audience (journalists, political partisans, and others who maintain a continuous attention to political matters); and (3) an elite audience (specialists and people who are specifically informed or are directly affected by the issues that a president addresses in a given speech). For the most part this speech was aimed at the latter two. The general public would find little in the speech to arouse it. Much of what President Carter had to say had already been said before or contained little new information. In addition, the President did not announce any new action to be taken, one of the major things that causes a mass audience to react. Undoubtedly, the President chose to give this speech at a Commencement celebration rather than use a prime time television because his primary audience was not the mass public. Instead, he targeted his speech at the attentive and elite audience, for it was from these people that the criticism of his foreing polcieis had come. It was these audiences that needed to be convinced that his ideas formed a coherent policy. And it was

with these audiences that his speech encountered difficulties.

Covering so much territory in the speech had the political effect of opening new frontiers for interpretation and criticism. The part that dealt with the Middle East, for example, took on a poignant meaning since only a week before a new conservative government (headed by Menachem Begin of the Likud party) had been elected. Begin had referred to "liberated" rather than "occupied" territories when describing the Israeli settlements on the West Bank. And during his campaign, Begin had pledged not to return the territories won in the 1967 war under any circumstances. Thus, Carter's mention of a Palestinian homeland and his call for Israel to abide by U.N. resolution 242 (which recommended a return of the captured territories as essential to any peace settlement) was bound to receive prominent attention in press reports as well as cause some degree of indignation in Israel. And such were the results. The Washington Post gave conspicuous attention to this part of the speech, even as it recognized that human rights formed the essence of the address.[19] So too did other media pick out specific points to report and speculate about.

Even as the news media praised the commitment to human rights and voiced some skepticism about the optimistic tone of the address, a general consensus was that the speech had two weaknesses: (1) an ambiguity about the precise direction Carter intended to take in foreign policy; and (2) questions about how human rights could be transformed from an idealistic theory to practical policies. An example of each may help to explain the

problems each entailed. These problems were principally internal within the administration, but they had some degree of public effect as well.

At Notre Dame, Carter defined detente as making "progress toward peace." To that end he invited the Soviet Union to cooperate with the United States to reach agreements in a variety of areas including a ban on all nuclear testing, a prohibition against all chemical warfare, and a reduction of weapons. But implicit in his address was the other side of cooperation: competition with the Soviet Union which required military and economic strength at home. "The common ground within the administration was a shared belief that detente involved both cooperation and competition; the difference arose over when and how it was appropriate to pursue cooperation, and when and how it was necessary to wage competition."[20] Given Carter's optimism at this time, the theme of cooperation received the emphasis. Soon the theme of competition emerged in Carter's statements to challenge the theme of cooperation. But it was more than conflicting themes, it was a battle between Carter's two major foreign policy advisers--Cyrus Vance, Secretary of State, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's National Security Adviser--for control of the administration's direction in foreign policy:

> Vance more often saw possibilities for the cooperative path; Brzezinski more often saw a need for competition. While Vance agreed with a general priority on competition, he also believed it was possible to regulate that competition and to build cooperation. His chief divergence with Brzezinski was over what Vance saw as Brzezinski's "concept of an overarching U.S.-Soviet 'geopolitical' struggle" dominating U.S. Foreign policy. Differences also arose over questions of linkage (Brzezinski's sought to make detente more "comprehensive" by wider and tighter linkages) and

reciprocity (Brzezinski saw the Soviet Union as growing more assertive, a situation requiring that its assertiveness be either blunted or matched.) The differences in approach soon emerged and grew with each year.[21]

The theme of cooperation was at its peak undoubtedly because Carter was seeking to motivate and nurture Soviet moves to negotiate a new SALT agreement. But stressing primarily cooperation revealed one serious weakness in the address. If the Soviet Union chose not to cooperate, what then would the administration do and what would happen to its "new" foreign policy, at least in regard to the Soviet Union? As optimism faded in the administration, Brzezinski emerged as a more influential member. Eventually, this competition between Vance and Brzezinski would develop into internal warfare between the two requiring additional presidential speeches (especially the Wake Forest address and the Naval Academy speech, both delivered in 1978) to attempt to balance or reconcile the two approaches. Such later rhetorical attempts only contributed to the growing confusion over Carter's precise approach to relations with the Soviet Union. But the two men could not be reconciled, and finally they clashed over the attempted rescue of the hostages in Iran, resulting in Vance's resignation.

The problem of translating a theory of human rights into practical action was even more difficult. It was arduous enough to attempt to apply the principle of human rights consistently. But what should a government devoted to this principle do when none of its choices will support the principle. One excruciating example may suffice to demonstrate the enormous difference between philosophy and politics, between principle and practice.

In 1979 the United Nations confronted the question of which of two rival delegations to seat as the legitimate representative of Cambodia or Kampucha. One delegation was headed by representatives of the People's Republic of Kampuchea that had ... n created when the Vietnamese overthrew the Pol Pot regime in 1978. The other delegation represented the ousted Democratic Kampuchea. It was a question upon which the United States would have to vote. But how to decide? Upon this issue, the principle of human rights would not serve as guide:

> Both claimants had fought against the United States only a few years before. One regime sponsored by Hanoi, was imposed by external force an. would undoubtedly conduct itself with ruthlessness. The other, headed by the notorious Pol Pot, had earned a unique place in the annals of terror. Estimates ranged as high as two million Cambodians killed by Pol Pot and his Khymr Rouge army since they had taken over the country in the spring of 1975.[22]

If these hard choices were not enough, additional political considerations heightened the difficulty of the decision. The People's Republic was back by the Soviet Union, and Democratic Kampuchea by the Chinese. Furthermore, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nation representing Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore) as well as Australia and Japan strongly supported Democratic Kampuchea. Many of the European countries sided with ASEAN unless the United States took the lead in breaking with it.

The choice came down to voting with the majority of our political friends by voting for "one of history's most barbaric regimes"; or voting with a losing minority that would place the United States in the company of Moscow, Havana, and Hanoi by voting for the Vietnamese backed People's Republic, a vote that

would seem to sanction "the forcible overthrow of one country by another."[23]

Eventually, the United States voted for the odious Khymer Rouge government even though it controlled no cities in Cambodia and consisted mainly of a 30,000 guerilla army fighting the Vietnamese controlled People's Republic. Such a choice, though little publicized at the time, diminished claims to moral leadership and demonstrated vividly the problem by translating theory to practice when human rights sits at the center of foreign policy principles. These then were the internal problems that Carter's policies created and each had public consequences.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NOTRE DAME ADDRESS

In the post-war period, three American Presidents have given major addresses intended to change the assumptions and direction of American foreign policy. The first was President Truman's March 12, 1947 address on aid to Greece and Turkey that became known as the Truman Doctrine. That speech announced Truman's willingness to engage the Soviet Union in a Cold War and defined the principal themes and arguments that would dominate political rhetoric and American foreign policy for four decades. As much as any other presidential statement, Truman's speech activated the latent anti-communism in the nation and made it explicit as the official ideology of the United States.[24]

The second major address was President Kennedy's speech of June 10, 1963 at American University that announced the era of

detente and ushered in a new policy of seeking rapprochement with superpowers while at the same time committing American strength to fighting limited wars in surrogate small nations around the world. On the one hand, Kennedy set the terms for negotiating effectively with the Soviet Union. On the other, he did little to upset the traditional anti-communist ideology that justified other foreign adventures against smaller countries.[25]

The third major speech was Carter's at Notre Dame in 1977. Carter's address was just as radical as Truman's had been in that it sought to change basic assumptions of American foreign policy as well as our goals and many of our methods. Carter sought to change the motivating principle of foreign policy from a negative one ("containing communism" or "anti-communism") to a positive one (supporting human rights). He sought to change our perception of who was our primary enemy from the traditional enemy, "Communism," to a new enemy, "Totalitarianism." The shift required a different way of viewing international competition, a shift from perceiving a political ideology as our adversary to seeing those of either the left or right who suppressed human rights as America's adversary. Such a shift meant a radical change in whom citizens were to identify as their opponents and the bases for so identifying them.

Furthermore, unlike previous administrations that had used unilateral threats of massive retaliation or unilateral applications of American power in limited wars to achieve their goals, Carter stressed a trilateral approach among democracies to cooperate with adversaries through negotiations and moral suasion

in resolving disputes as they arose. But most important, Carter was attempting to change our perception and understanding of what it meant to be a world leader. Instead of policing the world or flexing American military muscle whenever a conflict broke out, Carter took a more complex approach, one that finds a felicitious description in Marina Whitman characterization of "leadership without hegemony."[26] Such a drastic change in Americans' view of their role in the world created more problems than it resolved, but in the minds of many, myself included, it was a more realistic role than previous Presidents had assumed or that his successor would insist upon. [See the accompanying chart for a comparison and contrast in the assumptions and goals entailed in Carter's call for a new foreign policy.]

Such dramatic changes in traditional beliefs could not be achieved through a single speech, and it would be unrealistic to expect that Carter's address at Notre Dame to have that effect. And, in fact, the speech got little notice for the sweeping changes it was proposing even as newspapers carried front page stories about Carter's effort. Nonetheless, in the short run, the principle of human rights took America from the defensive position our war in Vietnam had put us to a positive position more in line with traditional American values. Concurrently, it put repressive governments, most notably the Soviet Union, on the defensive as it highlighted their institutionalized suppression of these rights in their own countries.

From a longer view it may seem that Carter's insistence on human rights as the defining feature of both America and American

policies was idealistically naive, especially in an era in which _realpolitik_ is the reigning _ethos_. But it did have some lasting effects. For a time even into the Reagan administration, it reshaped discussions about the principles upon which the United States acts in foreign affairs. It gave sustenance and encouragement to human rights activists both at home and abroad. And human rights formed a principled basis upon which people could petition their governments for redress of grievances. But these effects were due less to any individual speech by Carter than to his persistent rheorical efforts in championing human rights, to his continued attempts to turn them into workable policies, and to the eternal longings of people for the liberation of mind and spirit that comes from those two magnetic words.

NOTES

1. President Jimmy Carter, "Toward a New Foreign Policy," Commencement Address at the University of Notre Dame, May 22, 1977, p. 245. All subsequent quotations are taken from this transcript of the address.

2. Michael H. Hunt, Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 185.

3. Quoted in Robert Shogan, Promises to Keep. Carter's First 100 Days (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1977), p. 219.

4. President Jimmy Carter, "UN Speech," Public Papers of the President 1977 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1978), pp.

5. Cyrus Vance, Hard Choices (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 53.

6. Ibid., p. 54.

7. Telephone conversation with James Fallows, November 3, 1989.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Fallows in an interview with Mark Schreiber, "News Talk," KQV radio, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, July 24, 1979.

12. Quoted in Shogan, p. 220.

13. Raymond F. Garthoff, Detente and Confrontation (Washington: Brookings Institute, 1983), p. 569.

14. Cf. Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The Deceptive Structure of Peace," Foreign Policy 14 (1974), pp. 35-55; "Recognizing the Crisis," Foreign Policy 17 (1974-1975), pp. 63-74; "America in a Hostile World," Foreign Policy 23 (1976), pp. 65-96. Holly Sklar, Trilateralism: The Trilateral Commission and Elite Planning for World Management (Boston: South End Press, 1980).

15. Stanley Hoffman, Dead Ends. American Foreign Policy in the New Cold War (Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1983), p. 68.

16. See Beth Ingold, "The Committee on the Present Danger: A Study in Elite and Mass Influence," doctoral dissertation in progress, University of Pittsburgh, 1989. Cf. Jerry W. Sanders,

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Peddlers of Crisis. The Committee on the Present Danger and the Politics of Containment (Boston: South End Press, 1983. Charles Tyroler, II (ed.) Alerting America. The Papers of the Committee on the Present Danger (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1984).

17. Telephone conversation with Fallows.

18. James Fallows, "The Passionless Presidency," Atlantic (May, 1979), p. 42.

19. "Carter Stresses Social Justice In a Broader Foreign Policy," Washington Post (May 23, 1977), p. 1.

20. Garthoff, Detente and Confrontation, pp. 564-565.

21. Ibid., p. 565. For justifications of their positions, see Brzezinski's Power and Principle. Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981 (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1983); and Vance, Hard Choices. Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).

22. Vance, Hard Choices, p. 124.

23. Vance, Hard Choices, p. 126.

24. See Richard M. Freeland, The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), esp. pp. 13-150; and Lynn Boyd Hinds, Rhetoric and the Social Construction of the Cold War Reality, unpublished dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1977.

25. For an anlysis of this speech, see Theodore Otto Windt, Jr., "Seeking Detente with Superpowers: John F. Kennedy at American University," Essays in Presidential Rhetoric, ed. by Theodore Windt and Beth Ingold, 2nd ed. (Dubuque: Kenall/Hunt, 1987), pp. 135-148; and for a more extensive analysis of Kennedy's rhetoric, see my forthcoming book, Presidents and Protestors: Poltical Rhetoric in the 1960s, to be published in 1990 by the University of Alabama Press.

26. Marina von N. Whitman, "Leadership Without Hegemony: Our Role in the World Economy," Foreign Policy 20 (1975), pp. 138-160.