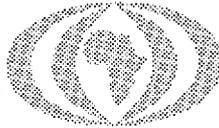


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BRIEF REPORT NO.5

PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER'S RECENT TRIP
TO LATIN AMERICA AND AFRICA
(March/April, 1978)

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this brief report is to try and place the recent four-nation odyssey of the American President into some perspective in the context of US foreign policy as it has emerged in the past 400 days. The trip, much like Carter's foreign policy record to date, was filled with more symbolism than substance, more rhetoric than reality, more showmanship than brinkmanship. This "shadow boxing" has arguably been a necessary step in the formation of a United States foreign policy which is attempting to come to grips with a dynamic international world, a world in which the United States is re-assessing a wide-ranging series of international entanglements in the aftermath of three traumatic periods in US political life - the Vietnam crisis, Watergate and the impact of Henry Kissinger on US foreign policy. It is the thesis of this report that the Carter odyssey in fact marks a turning point away from "shadow boxing" to substance.

The Trip: This was the second half of the President's "turn of the year" journey which took him to seven Asian and European countries. The early April trip took him to four countries in seven days and notably these countries were all in the Third World. Two in Latin America - Venezuela and Brazil - and two in Africa - Nigeria and Liberia. The symbolic importance of the Third World dimension of this trip should perhaps not be underplayed, for it illustrates the importance which the US Administration gives to policy towards this important grouping of nations. Perhaps because of the traditional assumption that Latin America is in the American sphere of "influence", the African, especially the Nigerian, part of the trip is the most interesting.

LATIN AMERICA

Venezuela: In Caracas Mr. Carter met the President, Carlos Andres Perez, and also addressed the Venezuelan Congress. The two Presidents discussed the Panama Canal Treaty, with Perez urging that Carter ensure the rapid course of the Treaty through the US Senate. They also discussed Carter's stand on the twin issues of Human Rights and Nuclear Non-Proliferation. Perez as the leader of one of South America's two democracies (Colombia is the other) praised the stand of the US President on these issues. Carter was however to hear a warning, which was to be repeated in Lagos, that US action on these matters should match US rhetoric. Perez' concern, especially with the issue of Human Rights, is arguably a function of his own relations with Nicaragua where the attempts by the Debayle régime to smash left-wing guerillas have disregarded Human Rights in that country. (There is a danger that an unsettled situation in Nicaragua might spill over into Venezuela.) In his address to the Venezuelan Congress, Carter re-affirmed his belief that the developing countries of the world should play a bigger role in the making of international economic policy - a clear reference to the growing concern in the United States that the prospects

of a North-South conflict in the quest for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) might have serious future ramifications both politically and economically. Carter also pledged increased US contributions to international development agencies like the World Bank. The President's one caveat, however, was that members of OPEC (of which Venezuela is one) should utilise their own surplus cash for the needs of the Third World.

Brazil: Here Carter faced perhaps the greatest hostility of the trip. Differences between the Geisel régime and the US Administration had been evident almost from the first day of Carter's Administration. Two important differences were Carter's criticism of the Geisel Government's record on Human Rights and Carter's attempts to stem the flow of advanced nuclear technology from West Germany to Brazil. Though not enthusiastically received by President Geisel, it appeared in their talks that Carter and Geisel managed to smooth out some of the bilateral differences which divided them. (Members of the Carter entourage remarked after the meeting that a distinct thaw in the strained relations had set in.) President Carter nonetheless maintained a strong stance on Human Rights, going as far as meeting opponents of the Geisel régime, like Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns. At a press conference, in response to a question on Human Rights, the President reiterated his belief "that this is an international problem...that focussing world attention and world pressure (on it)... can be a very beneficial factor...."

AFRICA

Nigeria: This was undoubtedly the high-point of the President's visit. Three issues dominated the discussions between the two parties: the supply (and price) of Nigerian oil to the US; the issue of Cubans in Africa (and the problems of the Horn of Africa); and the enduring problems in Southern Africa. Though clearly influenced by the oil considerations, the two issues of interest and importance for South Africans were obviously the latter two. These were thoroughly dealt with in Carter's address to the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs at the National Theatre in Lagos. Carter criticised Apartheid and called for majority rule in Namibia and Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. In an oblique reference to the Cubans, Carter called on Black Africans to settle their own disputes, without the interference of outsiders who might turn the continent into an East-West conflict.

The address drew a favourable response from the audience, but, as in Caracas, the President was asked to match his words by actions. Dr. Bolaji Akinyemi, Director of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, told Carter in his thank-you address: "In the coming days, weeks and months every word you have uttered here is going to be analysed. It is going to be dissected." At the same time, Nigerian Foreign Minister, Joseph Garba, issued a statement saying that the present UN arms embargo against South Africa was not enough. The Foreign Minister called for a cessation of new loans and investments. Notably, the joint communique after the Carter-Obasanjo meeting contained no reference to the presence of Cubans in Africa. (Some commentators believed that the President may have received certain private undertakings from the Nigerians on this issue.)

Liberia: In essence the stopover in Monrovia was an afterthought. The two Presidents, Carter and Tolbert, appeared to confine themselves to a discussion on the economic situation in West Africa and the question of US investments in Liberia.

ASSESSMENT

The trip would appear on the surface to have been a vindication of the belief that Carter's foreign policy to date has been more symbolic than substantive. However, arguably, the trip also marks a watershed in Jimmy Carter's foreign policy. It is perhaps no coincidence that the trip came at a time when both the President and Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, were beginning to show a more stand-offish approach to the Soviet Union, especially in view of the Kremlin's continued ignoring of US concern on the Cubans in Africa. (See, for example, Carter's North Carolina speech of 17 March, 1978.)

The linkage between foreign policy substance and foreign policy symbolism is often not a clear-cut one, but increasingly in the United States, Carter is being asked to make the distinction clear. Many Americans, especially in the media, are beginning to doubt Carter's ability to make decisions (domestic or foreign), and many Americans appear to be showing a lack of appreciation for the Carter style of government - perhaps indicating a preference for realism over veracity. The impact of these feelings on the Administration is likely to be profound - Jimmy Carter, in his second year of office, can simply not ignore them. Now possibly the symbolism of the first 400 days will be translated into substance, and there appears to be a good case for thinking that the Carter odyssey to the Third World will make the change.

What emerges from this Presidential trip as likely pointers for the future?

1. For South Africa, it seems that increasingly the attitude of the Administration is likely to be a function of their relationship with the leading African country, Nigeria. (For Carter there is a happy congruence between his warm relations with Lagos and his stand-offish approach to Pretoria).

2. Carter's foreign policy towards the Third World will be increasingly coloured by considerations - both political and economic - of the North-South debate.

3. The commitment to Human Rights, notwithstanding its apparent opaqueness, will remain sincere and steadfast. International politics, like life, is a mix of realism and idealism, and to see simply hypocrisy or double standards in Carter's stance on Human Rights is to take no cognisance of the element of realism. There can be no blanket application of Human Rights policy; rather the commitment has to be weighed against other considerations affecting the national interest. In the case of South Africa, Carter's stance on Human Rights coincides with what is seen as a waning importance of this country in American eyes, plus a belief that the forces of change at work here are historic and that the US should side with an eventual winner.

There is, however, one note of optimism in Carter's signal from Lagos to Pretoria; "I believe that we should therefore combine our determination to support the rights of the oppressed people in South Africa with a willingness to hold out our hands to the white minority, if they decide to transform their society and do away with Apartheid and the crippling burdens of past injustices."

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