Continuity and Change in the Foreign Policy Beliefs of Political Leaders: Addressing the Controversy over the Carter Administration

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Continuity and Change in the Foreign Policy Beliefs of Political Leaders: Addressing the Controversy Over the Carter Administration

Jerel A. Rosati

Four conflicting interpretations have emerged regarding the Carter Administration's worldview and its impact on foreign policy. The field of political psychology is particularly helpful in clarifying these different interpretations and addressing the controversy over the foreign policy beliefs of the Administration. The development of the beliefs is based on a content analysis of the public statements made by the President, the National Security Advisor, and the Secretary of State throughout their four years in office. The study demonstrates that the Carter Administration initially had an optimistic worldview which was shared by the principal policymakers, but that a dramatic reversal of its collective image took place over time, reflecting the continuity and change in the images of the individual policymakers. This is explained by examining the interplay between the individual personalities, the impact of major events, and the influence of domestic forces on Jimmy Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Cyrus Vance.

KEY WORDS: individual and collective images; attitude change; content analysis; Carter Administration; American foreign policy.

INTRODUCTION

The study of American foreign policy has always been characterized by disagreement, currently manifested by conflicting interpretations regarding the Carter Administration's policy. Though agreement has developed over the need to examine the beliefs of its officials in order to understand the Ad-
ministration's foreign policy, there is nothing but disagreement concerning
the content of the Carter Administration's policy beliefs. The purpose of this
study is to utilize the insights of political psychology with an eye toward en-
hancing our understanding of American foreign policy during the Carter
years.

CONFLICTING INTERPRETATIONS

Since the beginning of President Carter's term in office, major disagree-
ment has arisen over whether or not the Carter Administration ever devel-
oped a coherent worldview. Four divergent schools of thought have emerged
concerning the Administration's foreign policy beliefs.

Some individuals have argued that the Administration never developed
a worldview. They argue that its decision-makers had no coherent and con-
sistent image of the international system (see, e.g., Gaddis, 1982; Fallows,
1979; Schlesinger, 1980). Rather, different officials represented and promoted
different worldviews and the President had a tendency to vacillate from one
perspective to another. Therefore, each foreign policy issue was analyzed
on its own unique merits—disregarding its interdependence with other
issues—and usually was resolved only after considerable internal disagree-
ment. The overall result was confusing and inconsistent foreign policy be-
behavior which lacked a philosophical foundation.

Other analysts argue that the Carter Administration had a coherent con-
ception of the international environment (see, e.g., Spanier, 1983; Tucker,
1981). "It is not true," states Robert Tucker (1980, p. 23), "that the charac-
teristic traits of the Carter foreign policy have reflected the absence of a world
view in the President's mind, a view that can be and has been coherently ar-
ticulated. Carter quite clearly has a world view." It is argued that Adminis-
tration officials shared an image of a complex and interdependent
international system in which the United States should play a constructive
role alongside global change—the emphasis was not on traditional power
politics but world order politics.

Other analysts maintain that the Carter Administration always held a
worldview but that it changed with time. Initially the Administration oper-
ated with an optimistic and complex view of the world, only to see it become
pessimistic with time—concerned primarily with containing Soviet expan-
sionism. There is little agreement, however, about when and why the change
in image occurred: during 1978, due to Soviet activities in the Horn of Africa
(see, e.g., Serfaty, 1978), as a result of the Iran hostage crisis and the Soviet
invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979 and early 1980 (see, e.g., Gelb, 1980),
or due to domestic politics and international events throughout the Adminis-
tration's four years in office (see, e.g., Osgood, 1981; Sanders, 1983; Smith,
1986).
In addition to the three schools of thought just discussed, other foreign policy analysts argue that although the Carter Administration initially did not have a worldview, it eventually formed one. Although differences in individual policymaker images persisted for three years, by 1980 a consensus perspective had developed among Administration officials behind a policy of containment following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (see, e.g., Brown, 1983; LaFeber, 1984).

A number of problems with the literature reviewed hinders a resolution of the debate over the Carter Administration’s foreign policy. First, the concept of worldview is rarely defined. Second, it is usually unclear what officials comprised the “Carter Administration.” Finally, the interpretations are principally derived from limited historical research and intuitive analysis. Because the studies have not been systematic about their inquiry into the Administration’s foreign policy, it becomes difficult to address the controversy over the content and evolution of Administration beliefs. It is necessary, therefore, to go beyond this traditional literature. The field of political psychology has investigated beliefs for some time and can provide the foundation for addressing the disagreement over the Carter Administration’s foreign policy.

THE BELIEF SYSTEM LITERATURE

Three research questions guide this study: What was the Carter Administration’s image of the international system throughout its four years in office? Was the image shared by major Administration officials or did important differences in individual images exist? Did the images held by individual policymakers remain stable or did they change? In order to address these questions, 3 areas in the literature on beliefs must be examined: individual and collective images, the level of image consensus among individuals, and the level of stability in individual images. This literature not only provides a better understanding of the conflicting interpretations by discussing the assumptions on which they are based but also serves as a source of explanation for understanding the evolution of the Carter Administration’s worldview.

Individual and Collective Images

The concept of a Carter Administration image obviously simplifies reality somewhat. An administration does not have a belief system per se. Yet, when individuals are grouped so as to represent an administration, or any actor, it can be argued that a belief system comprised of the aggregation of individual beliefs does exist for the entire group. Therefore, a primary focus
of this study is to determine the individual and collective images of the Carter Administration.

Discussion of a collective image has not received much attention. Most scholars in the area of foreign policy and international relations have focused on the beliefs of a key individual or leader (for major exceptions, see Bonham and Shapiro, 1982; George, 1969; Larson, 1986; Leites, 1951). For example, Holsti (1967) has examined the beliefs of John Foster Dulles and Starr (1984) and Walker (1977) have examined the beliefs of Henry Kissinger. Although analyzing an individual leader minimizes the empirical problems for identifying the content of beliefs, it considerably simplifies the collective nature of most decision-making. Foreign policy decisions are rarely made by a single political leader.

In order to examine the beliefs of a collective unit it is important to specify whose beliefs are to be addressed. However, the study of perceptions and beliefs has not been linked to various conceptualizations of foreign policy decision-making. “The fact is we do not have an acceptable model of the manner in which the cumulative, interactive effects of individuals’ attitudes aggregate to condition the structure of beliefs of the collectivity of which they are a part” (Kegley, 1986, p. 454). The study of groups in social psychology has surprisingly not addressed the concept of the beliefs of a group or collectivity. As explained by Jones (1985, p. 77; see also Steiner, 1974),

In a curious way, social psychology has always been ambivalent about the study of groups per se. Some of this ambivalence may be traced to the heated controversies of the 1920s over the conceptualization of group properties. McDougall’s 1920 treatment of group processes was dramatically titled The Group Mind, even though he later vigorously denied consciousness as a group property. The mystical idea that groups could be characterized by emergent anthropomorphic properties was mercilessly attacked by F. H. Allport and others in the mainstream of behaviorism, a fact that probably channeled subsequent psychological research toward the study of individual responses to group influences and away from the study of groups as groups.

Because this study focuses on the Carter Administration’s general foreign policy throughout its 4 years in office, it is most appropriate to conceptualize the executive branch as an actor represented by the most important decision-makers: the head of state and his/her closest advisors (Krasner, 1978; Rosati, 1981). In other words, the collective image of an administration is dependent upon the belief systems of those policymakers who have a disproportionate share of the influence within the foreign policy process. As suggested by Snyder and Diesing (1977, p. 526), “the operative values and perceptions of the decision-making unit will depend on the balance of influence among its constituent members... If one or two persons are in complete control, the operational ‘interests’ of the state will reflect their perspectives.”
In the United States, the specific officials comprising the foreign policymaking core include, most importantly, the President, the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, and the Secretary of State (see, e.g., Destler, 1972; Kegley and Wittkopf, 1982; Nathan and Oliver, 1983). These, in fact, were the most important officials in the making of the Carter Administration’s foreign policy. Therefore, the Administration's collective image is based on the individual images of President Jimmy Carter, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance (later replaced by Edmund Muskie). In order to analyze the content of the Administration’s collective image over time, the concepts of image consensus and image stability need to be addressed.

**Image Consensus versus Image Dissensus**

The collective image is the aggregation of the images of all the individuals who comprise the collectivity. In this case the President, the National Security Advisor, and the Secretary of State comprised a collectivity because they shared common characteristics: They were the highest level officials primarily responsible for the conduct of American foreign policy within the Carter Administration. This definition of collectivity does not assume that the members of the group share the same beliefs about the international environment, however—they may or may not (Shaw, 1976). Therefore, it is important to determine the level of agreement or disagreement in the images among the key policymakers in order to understand the Carter Administration’s collective image.

Within a specific administration, chances are there will be a relatively high degree of overlap in the belief systems of policy-making officials, especially for the highest-level policymakers. Because the President appoints the higher-level officials and usually determines who is to advise and assist him in formulating decisions, a compatible viewpoint is usually a prerequisite in gaining access to the President (Art, 1973; Cronin, 1975; James, 1974; Pious, 1979). Moreover, as Janis (1982) has pointed out, “groupthink” can occur in small groups which develop a high esprit de corps and are usually headed by a domineering leader, with the result being a high degree of individual conformity and group consensus in thought and image.

Nevertheless, particular differences in belief systems can also exist among policymakers. “World view differences not only lie at the heart of interstate conflict and domestic debate on foreign policy, but are responsible for much of the difficulty in developing coherent policy intragovernmentally” (Cottam, 1977, p. 11). The literature on bureaucratic politics emphasizes
differences in individual images and, therefore, focuses upon dissension in image within the collectivity (Allison, 1971; Allison and Halperin, 1972; Halperin, 1974).

In sum, in order to accurately describe the Carter Administration’s worldview it is important to examine “the range of core beliefs that are widely shared, as well as those on which there may be substantial variation” (Holsti, 1977, p. 30). The level of consensus or dissension between policymaker images is important for determining whether or not the Carter Administration had a cohesive worldview. Although little work in political psychology has directly addressed the concept of collective images of political leaders, the literature reviewed suggests that both consensus and dissension within the collective image are possible.

Image Stability and Image Change

Since the collective image is the aggregation of individual images, a change in individual images over time is likely to produce changes in the collective image. Therefore, the concepts of stability and change in individual images are important for explaining the evolution of the Carter Administration’s image.

The debate over the stability of individual belief systems, once they have been formed, has been one of the most difficult and controversial issues addressed in the area of political attitudes. Originally, in the 1930s and 1940s, individual belief systems were considered to be highly open to manipulation and change. Later, in the 1950s and early 1960s, it was common to describe belief systems in terms of their inherent stability and resistance to change. Both positions are simplistic. Overall, while it appears that individual belief systems are resistant to change, change may still occur given the right conditions. This has direct implications for the evolution of the Carter Administration’s worldview.

The Dominance of Image Stability

Once formed, belief systems are usually resistant to change. First, individuals usually strive for cognitive consistency in developing a belief system. The main principle behind such consistency is that individuals attempt to avoid the acquisition of beliefs which are inconsistent or incompatible with one another—especially in relation to their most central beliefs (Jervis, 1976; Oskamp, 1977; Steinbruner, 1974). The result is the formation of an image which is internally interdependent and, therefore, difficult to modify.
Second, most of the communications to which individuals are exposed are rarely found to be persuasive. Rather, the common pattern is to promote the reinforcement of existing images (McGuire, 1985; Sears and Whitney, 1973). The failure of most appeals can be found at two different but complementary stages of the communication process: reception and acceptance. Most individuals are indifferent to most appeals, especially political propaganda, and when they are attuned they tend to be surrounded by people and communicators with whom they sympathize.

The prevalence of cognitive consistency and the reinforcement tendency of most communications produce images which maintain high levels of stability over time. The classic illustration of belief system stability is Newcomb's study of alumnae from Bennington College (Newcomb et al., 1967), which found that once political attitudes were formed as students during the 1930s, the same attitudes were retained 25 years later. In the study of foreign policy, a similar emphasis on the stability of images has also been demonstrated in studies of John Foster Dulles (Holsti, 1967), Henry Kissinger (Starr, 1980), and American policymakers in the Arab-Israeli conflict (Bonham, 1979).

The Occurrence of Change

Although images are highly stable with time, this does not imply that change does not or cannot occur, only that it is unlikely. The images of political leaders may undergo change as a result of the interplay of three major factors: the importance of an individual's personality as a foundation for his/her beliefs, the impact of external events, and the role of domestic forces. Image change is most likely to occur if an individual's belief system is not dependent upon his/her personality characteristics, if traumatic environmental events occur, and if strong countervailing domestic forces are at work.

Personality is important in the development of an individual's belief system and for any attitudinal change that may occur with time. All beliefs are not equally resistant to change. The stability of beliefs is a function of the needs that the beliefs fulfill (Katz, 1960; Lane and Sears, 1964; Smith et al., 1956). According to Oskamp (1977, p. 175), "this seems to be a valuable viewpoint... however, functional approaches to attitude change have not been widely accepted nor frequently studied by researchers." Beliefs that are based on the inner needs of an individual (e.g., ego-defensive needs) are the most resistant to change. Beliefs that enable an individual to better understand and adapt to the environment are more open to change. The implication is that different individuals have different propensities to accept changes in their images. As pointed out by Milton Rokeach (1960), individuals vary enormously along an "open-minded" and "close-minded" continuum.
That an individual is relatively open to new information is not sufficient in itself to produce a change in image. Some type of stimulus from the environment is required to attract an individual’s attention and to trigger the possibility for new information to be absorbed. Image changes are usually accompanied by the presence of a perceived altered environment, as is often produced by dramatic events such as crises (Boulding, 1969; Deutsch and Merritt, 1965; Lebow, 1981). According to Robert Jervis (1976, p. 262), “since events with major consequences for a nation absorb so much of the citizen’s time and attention, they both socialize the previously unconcerned and change the perceptual predispositions of many people with established views.”

The third major factor contributing to possible image change is the role of domestic forces. The interaction of public opinion, issues that become politicized (usually through the media), and elections can create a domestic environment that policymakers are unlikely to ignore. These three domestic factors can be particularly potent in affecting individual belief systems when they coalesce and are perceived to be a strong force throughout the society [see Mueller (1973), Neustadt (1960) on American politics; Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), Kelman (1958) on conformity]. When domestic forces are active and intense, especially during an election year, policymakers are particularly susceptible to image alteration.

Although images may be resistant to change, a number of studies in international relations have demonstrated that the images of political leaders have undergone change. Ben-Zvi (1978) found that the images that American leaders held of Japan were dramatically altered following the attack on Pearl Harbor and World War II. Thomas Hart (1976) found that of 70 Swedish national security elites, two-thirds reported that they had experienced “agonizing reappraisals” in which basic beliefs were fundamentally changed throughout the course of their careers. Holsti and Rosenau (1984) found that the Vietnam War shattered the post-World War II consensus on U.S. foreign policy among American elites. Thus, although individual images usually are stable, it is possible that they may undergo change with time.

The literature on belief systems allows us to understand better the controversy over the Carter Administration’s foreign policy beliefs. When examined in the context to this literature, the four schools of thought provide conflicting interpretations about the nature of the Carter Administration’s worldview based on assumptions about the level of consensus between key policymakers and the level of stability of the individual images. The four schools of thought actually represent four positions about the content and evolution of a collectivity’s beliefs:

Position 1. According to the first school of thought, the Carter Administration had no worldview, due to a dissension in individual images that remained stable over time.
Position 2. According to the second school of thought, the Administration had a cohesive worldview, due to a consensus in individual images that remained stable over time.

Position 3. According to the third school of thought, the Administration developed two different worldviews, based initially on a consensus in individual images that changed over time to a new consensus.

Position 4. According to the fourth school of thought, the Administration eventually developed a worldview, based initially on a dissension in individual images that changed over time toward consensus.

All four of these positions are consistent with the belief system literature and, thus, all four are theoretically plausible. Nevertheless, it needs to be reinforced that little conceptual or empirical work has been conducted in political psychology on the beliefs of multiple individuals who comprise a collectivity. This is what we turn to in order to address the conflicting interpretations of the Carter Administration’s worldview.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

The term worldview in this study refers to an image of the international system. It is argued that policymakers choose policy and base governmental actions upon their perceptions and images of the international system. It is almost inconceivable to imagine that policymakers choose policy and have their governments act without any reference to the basic structures and processes which they believe exist in the international system. An image of the international system can be described by addressing the following questions:

- What is the current nature of the international system?
- What are the most important issues?
- Who are the most important actors?
- What type of future international system is preferable?
- Is global change desirable?

The determination of the Carter Administration’s image of the international system is based on a content analysis of public statements made over 4 years by the President, the Secretary of State, and the National Security Advisor. As with any research method, there are a number of problems which must be addressed to insure a high degree of validity. In this context, it is important to recall Philip Converse’s (1964, p. 206) remark that “belief systems have never surrendered easily to empirical study or quantification.” Two major problems exist that complicate the utilization of content analysis: access and inference.
In determining the beliefs of public officials, three direct sources of information are available to the analyst: transcripts of private discussions, interviews with the participants, and official public statements. Obviously, it would be preferable to integrate all three sources to maximize coverage of a public official's verbal behavior. However, given the contemporary nature of this topic, I relied on the officials' public statements as the basis for the content analysis. White House transcripts or internal memoranda of the Carter Administration are not available, and interviews, although they may be insightful, would be based on the recollection of the past (this is the same problem with memoirs).

Closely related to the issue of access is the more significant problem of inference. Whatever documentary data one utilizes, the inference of beliefs from the content of the message is problematic. A continuous debate has ensued regarding whether most communications are "representative" of an actor's beliefs or whether they are purely manufactured and "instrumental" to persuade a specific audience. As suggested by Pool (1959), most communications are likely to contain both elements—representational and instrumental.

In addressing the problems of access and inference, it might be helpful to distinguish between three overlapping types of beliefs: private, public, and operational. **Private beliefs** are what an individual believes qua individual—the underlying beliefs. **Public beliefs** are those that an individual expresses in a social environment. **Operational beliefs** are those that an individual subscribes to as a decision maker. Since this study examines the beliefs of political leaders in the role of government officials, it is of fundamental importance to concentrate on a policymaker's operational beliefs.

The operational beliefs that individuals utilize as policymakers are most likely to be a composite of both private and public beliefs. In the case of the Carter Administration, I rely primarily on the officials' public statements and, consequently, their public beliefs for determining their operational beliefs or worldview. In this particular case, public beliefs are very meaningful for describing the operational beliefs of policymakers.

Four general reasons are offered. First, official declarations often act as a "constraint" on political leaders through their impact on other actors within the environment (Brodin, 1972; Snyder, 1958). Second, public officials are under constant scrutiny and they must maximize their "credibility" if they are to exercise leadership and stay in power, particularly in democratic societies (Brodin, 1972; Neustadt, 1960; Snyder 1958). The third reason is that "an actor may influence himself by his own declarations" (Snyder, 1958, p. 32)—that is, he may eventually believe what he states publicly (see Festinger, 1957, on cognitive dissonance; Bem, 1967, on self-perception theory). Finally, Carter Administration officials were very open in their public state-
ments. This is particularly the case for President Carter—he was incredibly open and forthright when he spoke publicly (see Weintraub, 1986).

To ensure that the analyzed public statements are valid and highly expressive, two complementary approaches have been employed. A quantitative content analysis was performed on the most significant and general public speeches. In addition, a qualitative content analysis of all Carter Administration public statements was conducted. The issue of "authorship" was a minimal problem since the major speeches were often written by the principal policymaker and usually cleared by the White House—very often personally by President Carter (see Marder, 1978; Quinn, 1979; Weinstein and Beschloss, 1982).

Sixty significant public speeches were quantitatively content-analyzed. Significant public speeches on the topic of foreign policy were the most useful statements for determining the policymakers' beliefs about the international system (determined by two criteria: the level of formality of the audience or the occasion, such as a joint session of Congress, and transcript appearance, such as in the State Department Bulletin). Public addresses are particularly revealing because, unlike press conferences, for example, speeches are initiated by the official. The themes within the public speech were coded in order to determine which were the most important international issues and actors actually perceived by the Carter Administration. Specifically, the public statements were coded in accordance with the image of the international system described above—for the issue perceived, the actors perceived to be involved relative to the issue, and various actor attributes (capabilities and intentions)—and were analyzed through use of frequency distributions (intracoder reliability was 0.84 for over 3300 themes).

A qualitative content analysis was conducted in order to determine fully the Carter Administration's image of the international system. In addition to significant speeches, other public statements such as interviews, press conferences, and other speeches were qualitatively content-analyzed to determine the issues, the actors, and the nature of global change perceived by the Carter Administration throughout the international system. As suggested by Alexander George (1959, p. 7), "qualitative analysis of a limited number of crucial communications may often yield better clues to the particular intentions of a particular speaker at one moment in time than more standardized quantitative methods."

A two-step process was utilized in determining the Carter Administration's image of the international system. The salient issues and actors perceived by the Administration were derived by quantitative content analysis while their particular significance for the individual and collective images was based on qualitative content analysis. The quantitative content analysis had its greatest validity and usefulness in providing general findings to the
Carter Administration’s beliefs at the collective level (due to the limited number of statements made by Carter in 1979 and by Brzezinski in 1977, 1978, and 1980), while the qualitative content analysis was most helpful for determining the individual images and comparing their similarities and differences.

Together, quantitative and qualitative content analyses serve as important complements in maximizing valid inferences of the beliefs of political leaders, thus minimizing the representational-instrumental debate. According to Krippendorff (1980, p. 49), “content analysis research designs have to be context sensitive.” Therefore, the content analyses “should use qualitative and quantitative methods to supplement each other. It is by moving back and forth between these approaches that the investigator is most likely to gain insight into the meaning of his data” (Holsti, 1969, p. 11). Through use of both quantitative and qualitative content analyses, determination of the Carter Administration’s image of the international system was maximized.

THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION’S IMAGES

1977, A Time of Consensus and Global Optimism

At the beginning of the Carter Administration, policymakers shared an image of a complex international system. What made the system complex was the emergence of a variety of important issues and actors, all of which had to be addressed if the United States was to respond positively to the changes taking place throughout the globe. This image of complexity was based on optimism about the future and provided the foundation for efforts directed at promoting a cooperative, global community.

Global change and an increasingly complex international system were the major themes of the new Administration in its first year. The world was not perceived to be principally bipolar. Rather, the dramatic global changes that were occurring ushered in a new international system containing a “new worldwide mosaic of global, regional, and bilateral relations” (U.S., President, Carter, 1977a, p. 625). Carter Administration officials perceived a very complex world, one in which interdependence and pluralism were facts of life that could not be ignored.

Given the growing complexity of the international system, a focus on East-West issues and the U.S.-Soviet relationship was deemed anachronistic. New issues and actors had to be addressed in a world of greater interdependence and decentralization. “Today, we do not have a realistic choice between an approach centered on the Soviet Union, or cooperation with our trilateral friends, or on North-South relations. Indeed, each set of issues must be approached on its own terms” (U.S., NSC Assistant, Brzezinski, 1977a,
Continuity and Change in the Foreign Policy Beliefs of Political Leaders

The promotion of human rights and democracy, arms control, the normalization of relations, the resolution of conflict in Africa and the Middle East, the health of the global economy, and Third World development were all believed to be significant issues that needed to be addressed (see Table I).

The world was so complex that neither the United States nor the Soviet Union could control the destiny of the planet. In fact, it was the conclusion of a “long chapter in the history of the West, namely, the West’s predominance over the globe as a whole” (U.S., NSC Assistant Brzezinski, 1978, p. 19). Therefore, although U.S. foreign policy previously revolved around the U.S.-Soviet relationship, today no international actor or group of actors was considered predominant. A wide variety of actors in all regions throughout the globe were thought to be important—their relevance depended on the issue being addressed. In fact, seven of the eight groupings of international actors were each addressed over 10% of the time—only Eastern European actors were relatively unimportant to the Carter Administration (see Table II). As explained by President Carter:

Europe and Japan rose from the rubble of war to become great economic powers. Communist parties and governments have become more widespread and more varied, and I might say more independent from one another. Newly independent nations emerged into what has now become known as the “Third World.” Their role in world affairs is becoming increasingly significant. (U.S., President Carter, 1977b, p. 194)

The Carter Administration sought to improve the world. It attempted to promote a new system of world order based upon international stability, peace, and justice. In order to pursue a global community, the policy of containment that had been the basis of American foreign policy since World War II was rejected. According to President Carter:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>1977 (%)</th>
<th>1978 (%)</th>
<th>1979 (%)</th>
<th>1980 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arms control</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security + defense</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M East conflict</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW Asian conflict</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African conflict</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other conflict</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normalization</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(n = 597^a\) \(n = 886\) \(n = 712\) \(n = 1099\)

\(^aNote.\) Number of cases indicates the number of issues perceived.
Table II. Actors Perceived

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Actors (%)</th>
<th>1977</th>
<th>1978</th>
<th>1979</th>
<th>1980</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet Union</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China + Asia</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W Europe + Japan</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 391a  n = 554  n = 420  n = 663

*Note. Number of cases indicates the number of actors perceived.

Being confident of our own future, we are now free of that inordinate fear of communism which once led us to embrace any dictator who joined us in that fear.... For too many years, we have been willing to adopt the flawed and erroneous principles and tactics of our adversaries, sometimes abandoning our own values for theirs. We have fought fire with fire, never thinking that fire is better quenched with water. This approach failed, with Vietnam the best example of its intellectual and moral poverty. But through failure, we have now found our way back to our own principles and values, and we have regained our lost confidence. (U.S., President Carter, 1977a, pp. 621-622)

The cold war era was believed to be at an end. The Carter Administration emphasized the pursuit of positive goals instead of the traditional American postwar pursuit of negative goals which ended up being counterproductive. Mutual cooperation and preventive diplomacy were believed to be the basis for addressing important global issues and actors.

In order to pursue a community among nations, the Carter Administration intended to promote positive change throughout the international system. President Carter was the most optimistic about the future. "It is a new world, but America should not fear it. It is a new world, and we should help to shape it. It is a new world that calls for a new American foreign policy" (U.S., President Carter, 1977a, p. 622).

*Image of the Soviet Union*

The Carter Administration's perception of the Soviet Union was fundamental in understanding the Administration's image of a complex international system and its quest for a global community. As suggested by general elite image studies and those utilizing an operational code approach (e.g., Holsti, 1967; Starr, 1984), the image of the "opponent" or adversary serves as an important foundation for understanding an actor's belief system about
Continuity and Change in the Foreign Policy Beliefs of Political Leaders

the larger international environment. The image of the Soviet Union held by Americans has played a key role in affecting U.S. foreign policy since World War II.

Basically, in 1977, the Soviet Union was not seen in a threatening light. It was portrayed rather optimistically—having a limited capability to affect the environment, constrained by the complexity of the international system, and, although occasionally opportunistic, overall peaceful in its intentions. This optimistic vision of the Soviet Union explains why there was minimal attention toward it in 1977—it was rank-ordered second in importance and addressed 16.6% of the time. The Carter Administration did not believe it needed to concentrate on the Soviet-American relationship and East-West issues. As described by President Carter (1977b, pp. 193-194):

> Our national security was often defined almost exclusively in terms of military competition with the Soviet Union. This competition is still critical, because it does involve issues which could lead to war. But however important this relationship of military balance, it cannot be our sole preoccupation, to the exclusion of other world issues which also concern us both.

In fact, with respect to the seven major issues that were of principal concern throughout the first year, Carter Administration policymakers believed that the Soviet Union had a major role to play only for arms control. The Soviet Union was discussed well under 10% of the time relative to the other six major issues: human rights, normalization of relations, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the conflict in Africa, third world development, and the global economy (see Table III).

Although Carter Administration policymakers shared a similar image of the Soviet Union, minor differences in individual images could be found.

| Table III. Significance of the Soviet Union for Each Major Issue, 1977 |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Issue                      | USSR  |
|                            | (%)   |
| Arms control               | 69.8  |
| Normalization              | 7.6   |
| M East conflict            | 6.8   |
| Development                | 6.7   |
| Human rights               | 5.7   |
| African conflict           | 4.4   |
| Economy                    | 2.9   |

\[ n = 391^a \quad n = 65 \]

Note. Number of cases indicates the frequency relative to all the actors and to the Soviet Union.
Brzezinski wanted to promote a cooperative relationship with the Soviet Union, yet he was more skeptical than President Carter and Secretary Vance concerning the sincerity of Soviet peaceful intentions. As long as the Soviet Union had high expectations and remained politically and militarily inferior, it would have to be considered dangerous. For Brzezinski, the Soviet Union was "still on the upswing of the historical cycle—of assertiveness, of expectations. I think it would like to be number one. I don't think it feels comfortable being number two militarily and a much lower number on many other areas" (U.S., NSC Assistant, Brzezinski, 1977b, p. 802). Yet, at the same time, Brzezinski believed that "just as the United States has gone through an imperialist cycle, and then waned, so it is my hope that the Russians will increasingly move into the world in a more cooperative, less imperially assertive fashion and begin participating in what is gradually, truly emerging: namely, a global community" (U.S., NSC Assistant Brzezinski, 1977d, p. 29).

Whereas Vance and, in particular, Carter were basically optimistic about the Soviet Union, Brzezinski was more ambivalent. Though he recognized the limited capabilities and international constraints imposed on the Soviet Union, he was not optimistic about Soviet intentions. Brzezinski was both hopeful yet skeptical that the Soviet Union would play a cooperative role:

We are challenging the Soviets to co-operate with us or run the risk of becoming historically irrelevant to the great issues of our time. We're not being naive in the sense of expecting an instant accommodation. I think we're reasonably vigilant to the fact that the competition goes on and therefore we have to compete. But we are also very much aware of the fact that in this shrinking world the imperative of co-operation has become more urgent. (U.S., NSC Assistant Brzezinski, 1977c, p. 4)

In sum, subtle differences in individual images did exist during the first year of office, especially over Soviet intentions. President Carter was the most optimistic about the Soviet Union and the future of the international system. Yet even with these differences, the optimistic image of a complex international system and the quest for global community was widely shared within the Carter Administration.

1978, Emergence of Policymaker Differences in Image

The Carter Administration's optimism concerning a complex international system and global change continued into its second year, although events in Africa challenged this image. Differences in individual images clearly emerged. While President Carter and Secretary of State Vance adhered to an image of global complexity and the pursuit of global community, National Security Advisor Brzezinski's image began to place greater emphasis on political-military issues and the need to contain the Soviet Union's foreign interventionism.
Conflict in the Horn of Africa became the most significant issue for 1978, prompting Carter Administration officials to question their optimistic image of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was now perceived to be more important throughout the globe and the Administration became concerned with a new issue—Western security and defense. Whereas in 1977 the Soviet Union was considered of major global significance only for the issue of arms control, now in 1978 it was considered important in relation to five of the seven major issues: arms control, Western security and defense, normalization of relations, the conflict in Africa, and human rights (see Table IV).

Brzezinski’s image of the international system seems to have been deeply affected by the events in Africa—what hope he had about the future of Soviet behavior was lost. Brzezinski became increasingly pessimistic concerning Soviet cooperation and the positive benefits of a complex international system. The international system was not only becoming increasingly fragile and unstable, the Soviet Union was growing in power and willing to project that power globally. These two trends produced an arc of crisis—in the Persian Gulf and Iran, through the Middle East, down to southern Africa. If the international system continued to deteriorate, “the resulting political chaos could well be filled by elements hostile to our values and sympathetic to our adversaries. This could face the West as a whole with a challenge of significant proportions” (U.S., NSC Assistant Brzezinski, 1978, p. 6).

The Soviet Union’s foreign interventionism in Africa made President Carter and Secretary Vance more skeptical concerning their perception of Soviet intentions, but their general optimism was not seriously shaken. The international system was seen to be too diverse and decentralized for foreign interventionism to make much of an impact. According to Vance, “this diversity and irrepressible thirst for national freedom among the Third World na-

Table IV. Significance of the Soviet Union for Each Major Issue, 1978

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>USSR (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arms control</td>
<td>78.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security + defense</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normalization</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African conflict</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M East conflict</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(n = 554^a\) \hspace{1cm} \(n = 153\)

*Note. Number of cases indicates the frequency relative to all the actors and to the Soviet Union.*
tions are the surest barriers to foreign domination. We can best promote our own interest in these areas of the world by welcoming this diversity and respecting this spirit” (U.S., Secretary, Vance, 1979, p. 16).

Thus, during 1978, the Carter Administration’s collective image of the international system began to change. Individual differences in image surfaced and began to widen as Brzezinski’s image became much more pessimistic. However, this was countered by the overlap between Carter’s and Vance’s optimistic images, resulting in the Administration’s continuing effort to promote a global community in a complex world.

Beyond the concern with the conflict in Africa and the additional issue of the West’s security and defense, the same issues that were of greatest importance to the Carter Administration in 1977 continued to be important in 1978. The promotion of arms control, a flourishing global economy, the spread of human rights, the normalization of relations (especially with China and through the Panama Canal treaties), and the peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, were all high priority items for the Carter Administration (see Table I). Furthermore, although the Soviet Union may have been the most important actor in 1978, it did not preoccupy the Carter Administration. Western Europe and Japan, African actors, global actors, and Middle Eastern actors all maintained prominent places on the Carter agenda (see Table II). Thus, although more skeptical than before and beset by internal differences, the Carter Administration remained committed to building a global community in a complex world.

1979, A Divided Administration

In 1979, the differences in individual images of the Carter Administration regarding the international system sharpened. Although Secretary Vance continued to adhere to an image of a complex international system and remained optimistic concerning a new world order, National Security Advisor Brzezinski perceived an increasingly fragmented and unstable international system open to Soviet interventionism. President Carter at times shared Vance’s optimism but also displayed pessimism more in line with Brzezinski’s view. Consequently, two competing images existed in 1979.

Secretary Vance continued to perceive a very complex international system. The present was a time of global interdependence where problems could only be solved through international cooperation. While the United States could no longer dominate such a complex world, Vance believed that America could exercise leadership for the purpose of promoting positive change and a more cooperative world order. Support for constructive change meant the United States must practice preventive diplomacy and promote the welfare of the Third World.
By 1979, Brzezinski’s image of the international system was decidedly at odds with the vision held by Vance. For Brzezinski, the principal concern became the growing arc of crisis. Brzezinski believed that the Soviet Union was at the root of the problem of global instability. Not only was the Soviet Union becoming stronger with time as a result of its military buildup, it was not exercising restraint, thereby exacerbating global tensions. Therefore, the United States needed to strengthen its defense forces so as to deter Soviet aggression and promote the security of the West.

President Carter’s image wavered between Vance’s optimism and Brzezinski’s pessimism. Statements that once described a peaceful transition to a global community now contained elements of worry and doubt about a world of turbulence. Carter saw two possible futures and was increasingly unsure which one would prevail: a future of positive change and movement toward a cooperative, peaceful world order or one of negative change in which the world would become more turbulent and chaotic.

Carter’s ambivalence was most clearly displayed relative to the problem of regional conflicts. On the one hand, he became more concerned with the need to strengthen defense forces and protect the security of the West; on the other hand, he remained reluctant to use force or directly intervene. Much of Carter’s uncertainty was a function of his image of the Soviet Union. He appeared to be increasingly torn between the cooperative and competitive aspects of the U.S.-Soviet relationship.

As I have often said, our relationship with the Soviet Union is a mixture of cooperation and competition. And as President of the United States, I have no more difficult and delicate task than to balance these two. I cannot and I will not let the pressures of inevitable competition overwhelm the possibilities for cooperation any more than I will let cooperation blind us to the realities of competition, which we are fully prepared to meet. (U.S., President Carter, 1979, p. 23)

The conflict in individual images is revealed when the major issues perceived by the Carter Administration are examined. Nine issues were important, more than in any other year, and there was little agreement within the Carter Administration over the relative importance of the issues or how they should be addressed (see Table I). The incredible variety of issues addressed was an indication of a lack of focus and consensus within the Administration due to the existence of two competing worldviews.

Wherever the Soviet Union was perceived to be involved, dissension and disagreement predominated. The Soviets were important for those issues directly affecting the political-military situation of the United States, such as arms control, Western security and defense, and other regional conflict. For these issues, few other actors were perceived to be relevant. The Soviet Union remained relatively unimportant for the other major issues that the Carter Administration addressed. For these issues—normalization, conflict resolution in Africa, the global economy, the Arab-Israeli conflict, Third
World development, and human rights—the Carter Administration perceived a variety of actors to be significant (see Table V).

In summary, two divergent images, represented by Vance and Brzezinski, competed for ascendence within the Carter Administration. With Carter unable to adhere fully to either of the two competing images nor able to reconcile the differences between them, it was an incoherent image that survived as a divided Administration entered its fourth year.

1980, A New Consensus of Global Pessimism

The fourth year witnessed the termination of the Carter Administration's search for a global community in a complex yet hopeful environment. In its place, the Administration developed a new image: a quest for global stability in an increasingly turbulent world. Global change was no longer seen to be positive. The predominant focus became the containment of Soviet expansionism and maintenance of the West's security in Europe, the Far East, and, of immediate concern, in Southwest Asia. President Carter and National Security Advisor Brzezinski were the major proponents of this new image of the international system.

Unlike the earlier years, when the emphasis was on positive change and an effort to create a new world order, the international system was now seen as turbulent and unstable. Three simultaneous developments were believed to be challenging the United States and the West: the redistribution of global power due to efforts for change occurring in many areas of the developing world; the overwhelming dependence of the industrialized democracies on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>USSR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arms control</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security + defense</td>
<td>61.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other conflict</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normalization</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African conflict</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M East conflict</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ n = 420^* \quad n = 65 \]

*Note. Number of cases indicates the frequency relative to all the actors and to the Soviet Union.
oil from the Middle East; and the steady growth and global projection of Soviet military power. The arc of crisis was now perceived to be the dominant feature of an increasingly fragmented international system.

Two events in particular overwhelmed the thinking of administration officials, especially Carter: the taking of American hostages in revolutionary Iran and the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. The Carter Administration in 1980 focused primarily on the instability and turmoil emanating from the Persian Gulf and Southwest Asian region and on the Soviet threat to Western security. Issues integral to the earlier optimistic image of the international system receded in importance. The Middle East conflict, human rights, the normalization of relations, and arms control received less attention. Other issues which in the past had been important were put on the back-burner and forgotten: conflict in Africa, the global economy, and third world development (see Table I).

No longer was the world viewed as being increasingly pluralistic. Rather, the Soviet Union was now the dominant international actor, receiving 39.1% of the attention in 1980. Actors in the Middle East, Western Europe, and Japan were also important in America's drive to stop Soviet expansionism, but no other actors received much attention (see Table II).

U.S. foreign policy concentrated overwhelmingly on the Soviet Union. Where that country was perceived to be important for only one of seven major issues (arms control) addressed in 1977, it was now perceived to be significant for five of the seven major issues addressed during a time of global turbulence. The Soviet Union received a disproportionate amount of attention for the two most important issues confronting the Carter Administration: the conflict in Southwest Asia and Western security and defense; it also was perceived to be the most important actor for other regional conflict and arms control (see Table VI).

Table VI. Significance of the Soviet Union for Each Major Issue, 1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>USSR (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arms control</td>
<td>89.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security + defense</td>
<td>63.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW Asian conflict</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other conflict</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normalization</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M East conflict</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 663*    n = 253

*Note. Number of cases indicates the frequency relative to all the actors and to the Soviet Union.
The Soviet Union was considered the major destabilizing force in the world and a direct threat to the West. Memories of Munich and military aggression became associated with the Soviet threat. In Brzezinski’s view, the Soviet Union was challenging the third central strategic zone vital to the United States and the West: Following World War II, first Western Europe was challenged, then the Far East, and now Southwest Asia and the Persian Gulf.

President Carter’s response to Soviet expansionism and its future threat was to reinstate the containment strategy to the forefront of American foreign policy. Following the invasion of Afghanistan, the Carter Doctrine was enunciated: “Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force” (U.S., President, Carter, 1980a, p. B). In order to contain Soviet aggression and ensure the security of the West and the world, Carter Administration officials believed it was mandatory for the United States to increase its defense and gain the support of its allies. Unlike the earlier years, the Carter Administration now emphasized continuity with past American foreign policy.

Not all members of the foreign policy-making triad shared the same image of an unstable, fragmented environment threatened by the Soviet Union. Secretary of State Vance never fully subscribed to this pessimistic image—he eventually resigned following the military attempt to rescue the U.S. hostages held in Iran. Secretary of State Edmund Muskie, Vance's replacement, was much more supportive of the pessimistic image but also tried to retain some of the beliefs that were central to the original image of a complex global community.

In sum, the Administration's primary goal was to contain the Soviet threat to Western security in Southwest Asia in order to promote global stability. Zbigniew Brzezinski summed up the Carter Administration’s foreign policy for 1980:

Our larger purpose...is to create a stable framework of deterrence, so that peace can not only be preserved but can be transformed into active cooperation between the major powers of the world. Within that framework, we can accommodate the changes that are inevitable. We can help guide the process of global changes toward institutional arrangements we can now only dimly perceive and only imperfectly imagine. We can use the balance of power to help rectify the imbalances—of wealth, of technology, of literacy, of health—which will otherwise threaten our way of life and our survival. But we can only move constructively on that set of challenges if we move resolutely and effectively to address the challenge in Southwest Asia. Should we fail there, the balance of power from which we must build stability could be irretrievably lost. (U.S., NSC Assistant Brzezinski, 1980, p. 6)
Summary Analysis

The evolution of the Carter Administration’s image of the international system may be depicted more clearly by examining the changes that occurred in its view of the most important issues and actors. Although a number of diverse issues were perceived to be important during 1977, reflecting a more optimistic image, by 1980 the Administration concentrated overwhelmingly on a much smaller set of issues, primarily of a political-military nature, reflecting a more pessimistic image. Three major patterns emerge over time (see Fig. 1). First, attention to two of the issues—Western security and, especially, the Southwestern Asian conflict—increased dramatically. Second, three of the issues—the Middle East conflict, normalization, and human rights—remained important throughout the 4 years, although they declined in significance relative to Western security and the Southwest Asian conflict. Finally, four of the issues—arms control, the global economy, Third World development, and the conflict in Africa—decreased in importance over time (other regional conflict and energy were relatively minor issues, but grew in importance).

The overall pattern of concentrating on fewer political-military issues over time is repeated and reinforced by the Carter Administration’s perception of the most important actors. As with issues, three patterns emerge (see Fig. 2). First, one actor—the Soviet Union—increased in importance over time, especially in 1978 and most dramatically in 1980. Second, three groups of actors—those in the Middle East, Western Europe, and throughout the entire globe—remained important in attention received, but declined over time relative to the growing importance of the Soviet Union. Finally, three groups of actors—China and Asia, Latin America, and Africa—became significantly less important as the years progressed. (Eastern European actors remained unimportant throughout all 4 years.) The movement from actor diversity to concentration on fewer actors, especially the role of the Soviet Union, reinforces the description of the Carter Administration’s change in image from an emphasis on the hopeful possibilities of global complexity to threatened global stability.

UNDERSTANDING CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN IMAGE

The findings of the study reveal that the four schools of thought or positions discussed above were only partially correct about the Carter Administration’s foreign policy beliefs. No position was completely confirmed.
Fig. 1. Evolution of issue importance.

- Increased
- Decreased
- Stable
Fig. 2. Evolution of actor importance.
The first position argued that no coherent worldview existed, which was the case only in 1979. The second position asserted that an optimistic worldview existed, but this was no longer true by 1979 and was completely transcended in 1980. The fourth position believed that a pessimistic worldview eventually developed out of dissension, but this ignores the consensus that existed during the early part of the Administration. Only the third position, which maintained that the Carter Administration had a cohesive worldview that changed from optimism to pessimism over time, proved generally accurate. But, in fact, the evolution of the Carter Administration’s image was more complex than any single author recognized.

The change in the Administration’s image was both evolutionary and abrupt. While there was a consensus within the Administration in 1977 about the quest for global community in a complex world, Carter was the most optimistic and Brzezinski was the least optimistic about Soviet intentions. Consensus was shattered in 1978 when Brzezinski became pessimistic in response to events in the Horn of Africa. The breakdown of consensus accelerated in 1979 as a result of President Carter’s increasing skepticism concerning Soviet activities and his inability to resolve the differences between Vance’s and Brzezinski’s competing images. A new consensus emerged by early 1980, oriented toward global stability when Carter turned completely pessimistic and Vance resigned due to the Iran hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Table VII provides a summary).

The key to understanding the change in the Carter Administration’s collective image from global community to global stability is to examine the images of the three policymakers who comprised the collectivity. As the individual images evolved, the Administration’s collective image also evolved. Whereas NSC Advisor Brzezinski and especially President Carter experienced a great deal of change in their image of the international system, Secretary of State Vance’s image was relatively stable over time. Because determining why one person’s belief system was stable and another person’s image changed is extremely difficult, what follows is a brief explanation of the evolution of the three individual images based on the three interrelated factors discussed earlier: the individual personalities, the occurrence of major events, and the impact of domestic forces.

**President Carter**

Over time, President Carter experienced the most profound image change. The key factors that interacted to change his image were his personal lack of knowledge in global affairs and open-minded personality, the crucial events involving the hostages in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Af-
Table VII. Summary of the Carter Administration's Image of the International System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International System</th>
<th>1977</th>
<th>1980</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Major issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>Turbulent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td>SW Asian conflict</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normalization</td>
<td>Security + defense</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arms control</td>
<td>M East conflict</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M East conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major actors</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>USSR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China + Asia</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W Europe + Japan</td>
<td>W Europe + Japan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image of Soviets</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pessimistic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future View of change</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ghistan, and the presidential election of 1980 during a time when the domestic climate was becoming more nationalistic.

Because he was a highly motivated individual with little experience in foreign affairs, President Carter emerged as the individual most susceptible to a change in outlook. Carter had not developed many central beliefs concerning the nature of the international system when he assumed the presidency. Carter's lack of knowledge was combined with a receptivity to new ideas—he had an intense desire to know more about the world. He had a voracious appetite for information and spent much of his time studying the issues. Carter once remarked, "I'm learning, I'm studying. I get over here every morning at the latest by seven o'clock and go home in time for supper at seven, and then I spend two or three hours a night working and studying and reading. It's not a laborious thing for me because I really enjoy it" (in Johnson, 1980, p. 151). In the early years of his administration, however, Carter's experience level was still such that his central belief in human nature provided the guideposts by which he evaluated the world around him.

He entered office with genuine conviction in the boundless possibilities for relations among human beings (Carter, 1975; Glad, 1980; Mazlish
and Diamond, 1979). Quite naturally, this led him to harbor optimistic impressions of many of the world’s actors, most notably the Soviet Union. More significantly, though, it also compelled him to set high standards of behavior for nations like the Soviet Union. Therefore, whenever the Soviets acted opportunistically abroad and violated these behavior standards, Carter experienced periods of dissonance. Initially, he responded with surprise and confusion. As the pattern of Soviet behavior contrary to his expectations persisted, surprise and confusion turned to frustration and disenchantment.

Two events—the hostage seizure in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—compelled Carter to reassess his notions of the Soviet Union and the world. In an interview with Frank Reynolds on ABC-TV’s World News Tonight, Carter confessed how the Soviet invasion affected him:

My opinion of the Russians has changed most drastically in the last week than even the previous two and a half years before that. It's only now dawning on the world the magnitude of the action that the Soviets undertook in invading Afghanistan…to repeat myself, this action of the Soviets has made a more dramatic change in my own opinion of what the Soviets' ultimate goals are than anything they've done in the previous time I've been in office. (U.S., President Carter, 1980b, p. 4)

The domestic environment acted to spur and reinforce Carter's commitment to a more pessimistic image of the international system. The public became more concerned with the Soviet Union and America's military capability (Yankelovich and Kaagan, 1980; Schneider, 1983). This trend was further promoted by the rise of the “new right” and neoconservatism. Numerous individuals and groups who argued for a stronger U.S. foreign policy based upon fear of Soviet communism received considerable attention and gained legitimacy within the political system (see Crawford, 1980; Sanders, 1983). Nineteen eighty was also an election year, and the public agenda was basically defined by the political right. President Carter had to campaign for reelection in a domestic environment that was increasingly inhospitable to his earlier optimistic image of the international system (see Drew, 1981; Greenfield, 1982).

President Carter never developed the requisite leadership skills for getting the American public to understand and support his policies, thus countering the rise of conservatism throughout the domestic environment. The lack of strong leadership increased the possibility for public disenchantment with President Carter and his administration. Although Iran was basically ignored by the media throughout the 1970s, once Americans were taken as hostages the “crisis” became the ultimate media event. [Raphael (1981-1982) found that the three television networks covered Iran an average of only 5 minutes per year from 1972 to 1977.] This exacerbated the public's perception of Jimmy Carter as a poor presidential leader by constantly reminding Americans of the hostages' plight. This mood was further accelerated by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.
President Carter's new pessimistic image of the Soviet Union was consistent with the mood of the country. However, in the minds of most Americans the international prominence of the United States was considered to be at a low, and Carter was perceived to be a weak leader. Thus, the nationalistic environment surrounding the election not only promoted a change in Carter’s image but also contributed to his lack of support for reelection. [It has been argued that the Carter Administration's new image of the international system may have been temporary—that President Carter's change in image was a political expedient in order to respond to the domestic pressures and the rise of the political right that intensified with each international crisis, especially given that 1980 was an election year (see, e.g., Gelb, 1980). Whether or not the pessimistic image would have continued into the future will never be known. However, it is interesting to note that President Carter's farewell address in January 1981 (U.S., Carter, 1981) focused on three major themes that reflected his earlier optimism: the threat of nuclear destruction, the stewardship of the physical resources of the planet, and the preeminence of the basic rights of human beings.]

NSC Advisor Brzezinski

Zbigniew Brzezinski also changed his image of the international system. Brzezinski's change is particularly difficult to explain due to previous modifications in his thinking and the integral role his personality played in forming his image.

Prior to 1978, Brzezinski's image of the international system had undergone two other major transitions. A Polish immigrant and a prominent Sovietologist, Brzezinski developed a very pessimistic view during the 1950s and early 1960s of the Soviet Union and communism as the major threats in a bipolar international system (see, e.g., Brzezinski and Friedrich, 1956; Brzezinski and Huntington, 1963). Then in the late 1960s and early 1970s, his thinking changed, and he joined those promoting a more optimistic image of a complex global community—best represented by his book *Between Two Ages: America's Role in the Technetronic Era* (Brzezinski, 1970) and his directorship of the Trilateral Commission. This is the image with which he entered the White House (see Serfaty, 1978).

As noted above, Brzezinski was the least optimistic about Soviet activities from the beginning of the Carter Administration. Nevertheless, many people argue that he never shared a similar optimistic image of the international system as did Carter and Vance—that he entered office with a pessimistic image but initially was forced to assume a more optimistic one in line with the President's preferences (see, e.g., Sanders, 1983; Smith, 1986). Whether Brzezinski "privately" believed in promoting a global community
based on an image of global complexity in 1977 is an open question. What is important is that he acted in "public" and as a "decision-maker" within the Carter Administration as if he adhered to such a philosophy. In other words, Brzezinski articulated an optimistic image along with Carter and Vance, even though he was more skeptical about the Soviets' role within the international system. He continued to behave in this manner until the Somali-Ethiopia conflict triggered a change in 1978. It is interesting to note that Richard Melanson's (1983) study of American foreign policy during the Carter years arrived at the same conclusion, although based on a different method—interviews of Carter Administration National Security Council and State Department Policy Planning staff officials.

The interaction of Brzezinski's personality and external events seems critical in explaining his loss of optimism. Brzezinski was noted for being extremely ambitious, and for having coveted a high-level foreign policy position within the U.S. government (Drew, 1978; Quinn, 1979). Very attuned to elite opinion, he was often in the forefront of the most popular trends of thought in U.S. foreign policy, which may explain his abandonment of his early pessimistic image and his commitment to the creation of a global community in a complex world. Brzezinski was considered to have a large ego and to be terribly insecure. "Ego is such a vague, overworked concept, don't you think?" stated Brzezinski,

I prefer to perceive of myself as possessing an adequate measure of self-confidence, which is, of course, an absolute requisite for someone like me. I am very achievement oriented, and I have this peculiarity in my personality that I have come to accept: By a very large margin, I prefer winning over losing—and, although I do not say this immodestly, I'm pretty good at winning, I win a great deal. I seldom lose, very seldom. (Wooten, 1979, pp. 2-3)

Once he reached the pinnacle of power in American foreign policy, Brzezinski found he no longer needed to conform to external opinion. Alexander and Juliette George (1956) distinguish between "power-seeker" and "power-holder" in their personality study of Woodrow Wilson. In Wilson's efforts to gain power in order to overcome his low self-esteem, he conformed to the dominant beliefs of individuals who could significantly influence his rise. However, once Wilson successfully gained a position of power, he would demonstrate incredible rigidity and close-mindedness after he took a stand. This may be helpful in understanding Brzezinski's evolution in image: as power-seeker he was much more receptive to other people's preferences than as a power-holder.

Brzezinski's intense personality made his primitive beliefs of a growing and expansionist Soviet Union particularly susceptible to arousal (see Rokeach, 1968). When challenged by events in the Horn of Africa, memories of the past overwhelmed and shattered his optimism for the future. In fact, in March 1980, Brzezinski (1983, p. 189) wrote in his journal:
I have been reflecting on when did things begin to go wrong in the U.S.-Soviet relationship. My view is that it was on the day sometime in 1978 when at the SCC meeting I advocated that we send in a carrier task force in reaction to the Soviet deployment of the Cubans in Ethiopia. At that meeting not only was I opposed by Vance ... The President backed the others rather than me, we did not react. Subsequently, as the Soviets became more emboldened, we overreacted... That derailed SALT; the momentum of SALT was lost, and the final nail in the coffin was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In brief, underreaction then bred overreaction. That is why I have used occasionally the phrase “SALT lies buried in the sands of Ogaden.”

Secretary Vance

Unlike Carter and Brzezinski, Cyrus Vance’s image was relatively stable throughout his 3½ years in office. According to Destler et al. (1984, p. 95), “it was an irony that Vance was to help usher in the new era. He was by birth, style, temperament, character, and career, an examplar of the old Establishment.” A common characteristic of an individual raised within the foreign policy establishment is to avoid theatrics and operate at a distance from the public spotlight. Therefore, Vance’s image stability is difficult to assess because, although he was long on government experience, little is known about the man.

Vance’s experience with the Vietnam War appears to have been central to his thinking. While serving as Deputy Secretary of Defense under President Johnson between 1964 and 1967, he became increasingly pessimistic about the war (Hoopes, 1969; McLellan, 1985). Yet, it was not until he officially left Washington that he realized how far the American public had turned against the war (Oberdorfer, 1971). The tragic consequences of America’s intervention in Indochina dramatically altered and solidified his beliefs in a more optimistic direction. This was consistent with his background as a lawyer and special presidential envoy to settle important conflicts in Panama, the Dominican Republic, Detroit (following racial violence), Cyprus, and Korea throughout the 1960s. Vance believed that negotiation and diplomacy were the key means of promoting conflict resolution.

External events such as foreign interventionism in Africa, the Iran hostage crisis, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan only reinforced Vance’s belief in the need to exercise restraint and respond to the causes, not the symptoms, of the conflicts. The restoration of containment and militarization to the forefront of American foreign policy in 1980 and the specific decision to rescue the hostages against Vance’s advice left him with little choice. Three days before the military rescue attempt he submitted his resignation, becoming the first Secretary of State to voluntarily resign on a matter of principle in over 60 years.

This study has addressed the controversy over the foreign policy of the Carter Administration by examining the beliefs of political leaders. This per-
spective assumes that an understanding of the Carter Administration's foreign policy called for the application of insights that political psychology had to offer concerning beliefs and their evolution. It was found that, throughout the 4 years of the Carter Administration, a dramatic reversal of its image of the international system took place, reflecting change and continuity in the images of the individual policymakers. More work needs to be done on the concept of collective images. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this analysis contributes to the study of individual and collective beliefs in political psychology and improves our understanding about the evolution of the Carter Administration's worldview.

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