

Daniel Wattenberg

Clinton's Hard-Line Appeaser

Whether in serving Jimmy Carter or harassing the LAPD, Secretary of State-designate Warren Christopher has been a proud and tireless advocate of pain-free solutions.

In the spring of 1980, Col. Charlie Beckwith, commander of the Delta Force and one of the most decorated special forces heroes in the country's history, briefed President Carter and his top national security advisers on Operation Eagle Claw, the plan to rescue fifty-two American hostages being held by Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Tehran.

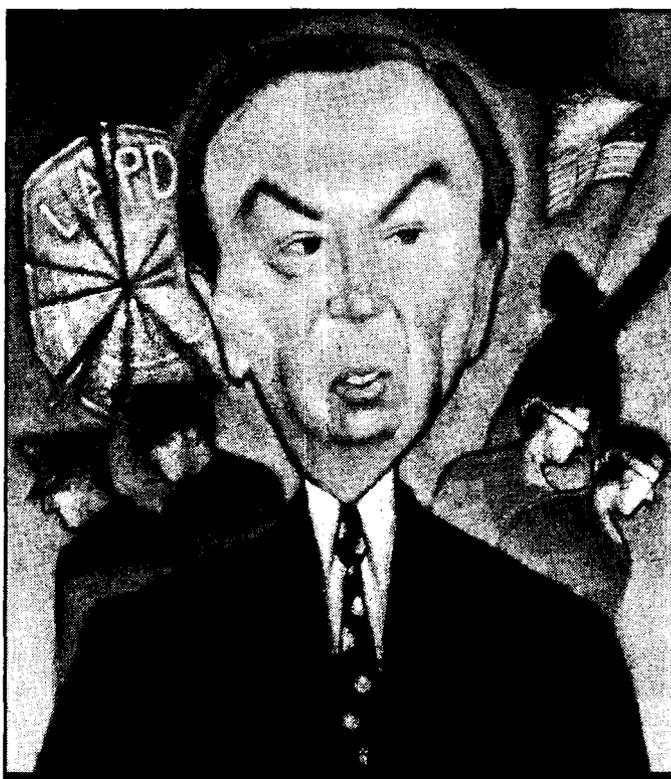
"The Secretary of State [Cyrus Vance] was there," Col. Beckwith remembers, "but he laid his head down all the time. He didn't participate or act like he heard what was being said." Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher took the lead in cross-examining Col. Beckwith on his rescue plan.

"I said that the people who come out of this building—there was a large building there that housed a lot of Iranian guards—when they come out we're going to try to take all those people down, and as we do that, we're gonna be going into the various compartments of their other buildings, searching for the hostages. And anyone who is holding a hostage, we intend to shoot him, and shoot him right between the eyes. We intend to shoot him twice.

"And Christopher said, 'You mean you can do that?'"

"And I said, 'We work very hard to do that.'"

Daniel Wattenberg's "The Lady Macbeth of Little Rock" appeared in our August issue.



"And he said, 'Well, would you consider shooting them in the leg, or in the ankle or the shoulder?'"

"Now Christopher is gonna deny that he said that, but it's the truth."

Christopher's solicitude for the Revolutionary Guards is particularly odd, given that the Carter Administration was still considering a punitive—and inevitably lethal—military strike on Iran, to be staged concurrently with the rescue mission.

There are those who argue that President Clinton's nomination of the Los Angeles lawyer as

secretary of state is not a cause for serious worry. In this view, he will be balanced by Clinton himself and the otherwise impressive national security team he has assembled. Anthony Lake and Sandy Berger at the National Security Council are able strategists. Clinton's nominee for defense secretary, Les Aspin, and CIA director-designate R. James Woolsey have strategic vision and backbone. Clinton may be inexperienced, but he has good instincts and firm resolve. How much damage could Warren Christopher do?

Plenty, unfortunately, if the Carter Administration is any guide. National security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski had spine and strategic vision. Defense Secretary Harold Brown understood the need for a firm American response to Soviet expansionism. And after a wishy-washy start, Carter himself demonstrated realism and resolve. Unfortunately, his State

Department was headed by Cyrus Vance and Warren Christopher. As a result, Carter got not only bad advice from State, but also internal stalemates between hard- and soft-line approaches, with the President caught in the middle. Even when Carter swung firmly toward the Brzezinski view late in his term, State often made the resulting policy hard to implement and sustain.

For the State Department gives operational expression to foreign policy. State instructs ambassadors, conducts negotiations, shapes embassy reporting, and enunciates U.S. foreign policy in daily noon briefings. When it is not in sympathy with the White House, it has a unique capacity to dilute, obstruct, and stall. Whether undermining support for the Shah or backtracking on security commitments in the Persian Gulf, it did just that in the Carter years, when Ethiopia, South Yemen, and Afghanistan fell under Soviet domination and Iran transformed itself into a terrorist theocracy. Warren Christopher, as Carter's deputy secretary of state—and de facto secretary of state under the clueless Edmund Muskie—was as responsible as anyone for cutting America's interests loose from their strategic underpinnings in the late 1970s.

Christopher's reputation as "Cy Vance without the charisma" is well earned.

A Carter-era State Department speechwriter recalls: "Christopher was by far everyone's least favorite person to deal with, precisely because his comments were invariably petty and inconsistent and in many ways wholly unimportant." Department speechwriters worked in State's Policy Planning Bureau, then headed by Tony Lake and his deputy, Sandy Berger. "He was notorious for sending drafts back and forth over and over again. I remember Lake and Berger being in despair because he once sent a draft back and forth thirty-three times. They had counted." (Perhaps Christopher's punctiliousness accounts for his limited output of foreign policy writings. His post-Carter chef d'oeuvre is "Diplomacy: The Neglected Imperative," a 77-page manila-bound collection of speeches published by his law firm.)

Christopher's reputation as "Cy Vance without the charisma" is well earned. Self-effacement is not incompatible with success at State, as secretaries from George Marshall to George Shultz have shown. But unlike Christopher, those two had a sure grasp of strategy and history. According to Brzezinski—whose magisterial memoir, *Politics and Principle*, can be read using Christopher's volume as a bookmark—blindness, not blandness, was the big problem with both Christopher and Vance. Both "were so much better when playing supporting roles than when given predominant responsibility for coping with the ugly realities of the contemporary world."

The two lawyers exemplified the litigational approach to foreign policy. Brzezinski wrote:

Christopher was at his best when supporting Vance, or when

negotiating on the President's behalf on the hostage issue. But when diplomacy yielded to power politics, Vance—and later Christopher when he became in effect Muskie's alter ego, given Muskie's relative unfamiliarity with key problems—preferred to litigate issues endlessly, to shy away from the unavoidable ingredient of force in dealing with contemporary international realities, and to have an excessive faith that all issues can be resolved by compromise. Unfortunately, in a revolutionary age, such an approach more often than not tends to be exploited by the Qaddafis, Khomeinis, or even the Brezhnevs or Begins of our age.

Dedicated to process, to "talking," Christopher lost sight of the strategic and ideological ends that necessarily guide choices of means. Though Christopher's approach was invariably averse to the use of force, that was not its main defect. Its main defect was that it venerated negotiation—by definition a means—as an end.

Christopher claims his approach "implies direct communication, whether to define our views, to explain our actions, to win acceptance, to invite cooperation. It involves addressing differences, struggling at least to identify them and ultimately, one hopes, to resolve them." In practice, this liti-

gational orientation resulted more often than not in the evasion of differences. It was ironically the "hawkish" Brzezinski who pressed for wide-ranging, in-depth dialogue with the Soviet Union, while the "dovish" State Department duo tended to view such dialogue as a threat to the "arms control process."

Throughout the Carter years, Christopher recoiled from confronting the Soviets over their regional adventurism, long after Carter himself had wised up. In the early months of 1979, recalls Brzezinski, "I monitored with mounting apprehension the intensifying Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan and I pressed for stronger U.S. reactions." State remained fixated on arms control. Eventually Brown and he "prevailed on Vance and Christopher, both of whom were less than enthusiastic, to register formally our concern over the Soviets' creeping interference in Afghanistan."

As Afghan resistance to the Soviet-sponsored Amin regime spread, the Washington pattern repeated itself: the NSC pushed to dial up the private and public heat on the Soviets, while State worried "that this might be seen by the Soviets as U.S. meddling in Afghanistani affairs." On the night of December 25, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.

The next morning Brzezinski convened a crisis management session of "his" interagency forum, the Special Coordination Committee (SCC). "I proposed at the meeting that we should immediately tell the Russians, through a Presidential message to Brezhnev, that SALT was now in jeopardy and that the scope of our relationship with the

Chinese would be affected," wrote Brzezinski. "Vance and Christopher objected strongly."

The problem with the State Department in general and Christopher in particular was that "they were unprepared for any confrontation," recalls a senior Carter official. "They were always looking for a way out and they did not want to be 'provocative.'" When, a week after the Soviet invasion, State at last fell in behind tough sanctions, Brzezinski observed acidly: "For reasons more explicable in terms of psychology than politics, those who previously were reluctant to react strongly to growing indications of a likely Soviet move against Afghanistan now urged actions stronger than those I proposed."

While the State Department would succeed in frustrating Brzezinski's hopes for a meaningful historical-philosophical dialogue with the Soviets, they would not succeed in getting SALT II. It's hard to think of a more fitting testament to the futility of Vance-Christopher litigationism than that unratified treaty. When applied to friends or coupled with leverage, the litigational approach can be defined as "diplomacy." When applied to implacable adversaries and not backed up by power, it is barely distinguishable from appeasement.

On November 2, 1978, Brzezinski convened a critical meeting of the SCC. After months of strikes, demonstrations, social unrest, and uncertain U.S. support, the Shah of Iran was paralyzed. The Shah had raised the specter of abdication for the first time and requested guidance from Washington within forty-eight hours. Brzezinski summarized what he'd heard, through sources including the Iranian ambassador to the U.S., Ardeshir Zahedi, regarding the Shah's state of mind and the mixed signals he was receiving from U.S. Ambassador William Sullivan. On that basis, he questioned whether Carter's policy of firm support for the Shah was surviving intact its transmission through Sullivan on the ground in Tehran.

Brzezinski proposed that Sullivan inform the Shah that the United States supported him unreservedly, felt that he needed to take decisive action to restore order, was agnostic on what form such action might take, and hoped he would resume his liberalization efforts after order had been restored. He then read aloud a draft message along those lines, stressing that Vance had already cleared it.

"This somewhat surprised Christopher, who pointed out that Zahedi was adept at giving the impression that the United States did not support the Shah and noted that a coalition government might still be the best way to provide movement toward a lasting settlement," records Brzezinski. In defending Sullivan against implications that he was diluting expressions of American backing for the Shah, Christopher may have spoken too soon. One week later, Sullivan sent Washington a telegram entitled, "Thinking the Unthinkable," in which he speculated that, should the Shah leave without a fight, the Ayatollah Khomeini would proba-

bly return from exile to play a "Gandhi-like role," and elections would probably result in an Islamic republic with a strong pro-Western leaning.

After creating a military government without the authority to clamp down, the Shah continued to vacillate between further concessions and the mailed fist before finally agreeing to leave and cede power to a government headed by the moderate, though anti-Shah, Shahpur Bakhtiar. He did not last long. Khomeini's return on February 1, 1980, confronted Washington with a fait accompli. From Brzezinski's perspective, it was a worst-case outcome. But Christopher saw it in a somewhat different light. On February 12, after another SCC meeting on Iran, Brzezinski noted in his journal: "I was rather struck by how eager Christopher and [Undersecretary for Political Affairs David] Newsom were to emphasize that the new regime in Iran is treating Americans well. I suspect that the outcome in Iran is one that not only fulfills some of their prophecies but also expresses some of their preferences."

Christopher provided implicit confirmation of Brzezinski's suspicions in a 1981 speech:

Algeria's struggle for independence from France was relentless and bloody, and in the end, triumphant in 1962. Most of the leaders of present day Algeria were leaders in the revolution. Many of them endured long imprisonment in the struggle for independence. This has given them an understanding and a credibility in relating to independence struggles of others, including Iran.

Not only did Christopher blithely equate the U.S. relationship with the Shah with the benighted French colonial rule in Algeria; he also saw Khomeini's triumph in terms of a classic anti-colonial independence struggle rather than as the medieval theocratic reaction against modernity it so plainly was. These remarks were made two years after Khomeini's return, after mass executions and arrests, after the hostage crisis. They suggest that, with respect to Khomeini, Christopher was not merely a before-the-fact naïf, but an after-the-fact apologist.

In 1979, America's strategic pillar in Iran had crumbled, the Soviets were knocking at the door in Afghanistan, and Soviet clients were entrenched in Ethiopia and South Yemen. With the support of Harold Brown and Energy Secretary James Schlesinger, Brzezinski attempted to activate the national security machinery in support of "a regional security framework." The idea was to reassert American power and influence in a region that had become an "arc of crisis" through additional air and naval deployments, joint exercises, and base agreements with regional friends. Vance and Christopher resisted at every turn. At times the dynamic duo and Brzezinski seemed to be in different governments, as Brzezinski recounts: "At one point in the debate, Schlesinger argued forcefully that American military presence in the Indian Ocean-Persian Gulf area should 'balance' the Soviets,

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The Real Mandate

by Grover Norquist

On November 3, 43 percent of American voters cast ballots for Bill Clinton. Clinton won thirty-two states while polling three percentage points below Michael Dukakis's losing showing in 1988. *USA Today* helpfully explained that this was a "landslide." *Time* and *Newsweek* found decisive "mandates," mandates for "change."

But just what message were voters sending? When voters rejected President Bush—who had himself rejected the low-tax policies of President Reagan—were they demanding a return to Reaganism or a leap forward to the even higher taxes implicit in Clintonism? A poll by Fabrizio, McLaughlin and Associates found that 40 percent of conservatives and 30 percent of Republicans voted against Bush. Were these voters repudiating their long-held principles?

Or were they reacting to the Bush Administration's orgy of spending increases and its regulatory binging?

The nation is stuck with Clinton for the next four years, and both the Clinton Administration and Republicans eager to recapture the White House need honest answers to the question of whether the low-tax, limited-government, strong-defense, traditional-values Republican coalition is finally broken, or whether it simply failed to find a presidential candidate among Clinton, Bush, and Perot. If the latter, then another Reagan could reunite the coalition and defeat Clinton if he governs as a liberal. If, however, the nation has truly moved left and would welcome—even demand—higher taxes for more government programs, then Clinton can move strongly left and win popular support.

The Democratic Leadership Council,

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created to move the Democrats back from knee-jerk leftism, argues that Clinton's centrist positions on welfare reform, the death penalty, and the line-item veto won the day. The DLC argues that the mandate for moving left is limited at best. Hillary Clinton's coterie argues that any vote against Bush was a vote against the "Reagan/Bush years." Raw political power, they think, will allow them to act on their left-wing principles.

The Republican party has similar divides. Reagan Republicans are wearing flashing neon "I Told You So" neckties. Bush, they argue, abandoned Reagan's most successful policies: low taxes, spending restraint, deregulation, and confrontation with the Democratic leadership in Congress. Bush raised taxes, increased spending more than even Jimmy Carter, added 20,000 new regulators to the public payroll, and cut secret deals with House speaker Tom Foley and Senate majority leader George Mitchell—whom he called his "friends" after each date-rape. Reagan Republicans argue that their coalition simply lacks a leader.

Liberal Republicans—led by Warren Rudman of New Hampshire, Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, and Tom Campbell of California—hold that it was the pro-life language in the party's platform, and appeals to evangelical Protestants and conservative Catholics, that cost Bush the election. This wing of the party has formed a "Republican Majority Coalition," which is given a more than respectful hearing by the press corps. No member of the Washington press has been rude enough to point out that the abortion language in the 1992 platform is the same as the language in the winning platforms of 1984 and 1988 or that 40 percent of George Bush's 1992 vote came from evangelical Protestants. The media's lack of critical analysis is matched only by that of Specter himself,

who—after admitting that the "religious right" was responsible for his come-from-behind 1992 re-election—is now trying his hand at Christian-bashing.

Unsurprisingly, as pollsters and pundits on both sides busy themselves torturing data and reformulating questions, liberals find that the nation has moved left, while conservatives are more convinced than ever that the Reagan coalition will hold. More instructive than theoretical speculation, though, is a look at the fate of initiative questions on ballots in forty-three states.¹ And not surprisingly, the establishment media has all but ignored the mandate from America's other national plebiscite:

Term Limits. Term limitations for members of the House of Representatives and the Senate were on the ballot in fourteen states. The *Wall Street Journal* noted that this was as close to a national referendum as the United States has ever known. Clinton, in obeisance to congressional barons Mitchell and Foley, opposed term limitations; Bush, while in favor of them, chose not to campaign on the issue. The verdict? All fourteen constitutional amendments passed, with an average of 66 percent in favor. In the fourteen states that voted on such measures, term limits took 20 million votes, while Clinton took only 14 million. Wyoming and Florida cast 77 percent of their ballots for term limits. California, home to fifty-two House members, passed limits by 63 percent. The closest call came in Washington state, where a strongly financed campaign—courtesy of House speaker Foley's ability to "encourage" donations to the anti-term limit

¹The states with no initiatives or referenda were Delaware, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Vermont.