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'Something that apparently troubles the Cubans significantly': Jimmy Carter's attempt to pressure Cuba 'out of Africa' through the Non-Aligned Movement, 1977-78

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to the literature on the US' and Cuba's 'conflicting missions' in Africa by focusing on a little-known (and failed) attempt by the Jimmy Carter administration, particularly between late 1977 and the summer of 1978, to mobilize the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to pressure Cuba 'out of Africa'. Based on a wide array of both primary and secondary sources, including declassified documents from US and French archives, this article shows that the Carter administration deployed a tactic, as yet virtually unexplored, to achieve its goal by attempting to bring about a diplomatic encirclement of Cuba in the Third World. This was particularly in the Non-Aligned Movement, of which Havana was scheduled to host the Sixth Summit conference in 1979. This essay enriches our understanding of Carter's approach to one of the issues which defined his presidency and sheds new light on his administration's interactions both with Cuba and with the NAM.

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Introduction

Scholars of international history have long recognized that during the second half of the 1970s US concerns over the presence of Cuban troops in Africa proved to be a major factor in pushing US foreign policy towards progressively more hawkish postures and, thus, constituted a crucial ingredient in the making of the 'Second Cold War'. Indeed, both the Ford (1974-77) and the Carter (1977-81) administrations treated Cuba's troops in Africa as 'proxies' for an allegedly expansionist Soviet Union, and often ended up adopting distorted views and controversial approaches to the issues at hand.¹ Superpower relations did not benefit from Washington's rhetoric about Moscow's 'colonial' designs

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¹Jussi Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 399-444; Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Piero Gleijeses, 'A Test of Wills: Jimmy Carter, South Africa, and the Independence of Namibia', *Diplomatic History*, 34, 5 (2010), 853-89; Piero Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom. Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976-1991* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 2013); Nancy Mitchell, *Carter in Africa: Race and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

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on the continent.² And, of course, Washington's denunciation of Havana's 'expansionism' did not bode well for bilateral relations across the Florida Straits, in spite of some attempts at 'normalization' which were made during the decade.³ This article focuses on a little-known aspect of this broad picture, that is the (failed) attempt by the Jimmy Carter administration, particularly between late 1977 and the summer of 1978, to mobilize the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to pressure Cuba 'out of Africa'.

The basic facts about the US' and Cuba's 'conflicting missions' in Africa during the Carter years are well known.⁴ By March 1977, some 24,000 Cuban troops were stationed in Angola, down from a peak of 36,000 which they had reached the previous year when *Operación Carlota* had successfully supported the armed forces of the recently established Marxist-oriented government in repelling attempted invasions by Zaire and white-supremacist South Africa. The Carter administration was already vociferously demanding the withdrawal of all remaining Cuban troops – which it accused of destabilizing the area – when, in July, Somalia, a former Soviet client now inching closer to the US, invaded neighboring Ethiopia, where another Marxist-oriented regime had seized power in late 1974. As Cuban leader Fidel Castro eventually decided to heed Addis Ababa's calls for help, between December 1977 and February 1978 a coordinated effort with Moscow brought another 12,000 Cuban troops to the Horn of Africa, where they soon proved crucial in driving Somali forces back across the border. Throughout, spurred on by National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter increasingly came to understand and publicly denounce Cuba's activism in Africa in terms of a grand plan by Moscow to destabilize the continent, despite Cuban denials and the more cautious attitude counseled by his own Department of State.⁵

Scholars have compiled a relatively long list of means adopted by the Carter administration at various points to try to force, or hasten, Cuba's withdrawal. In particular, the administration's original hopes were pinned on its offer to normalize bilateral diplomatic and economic relations with Havana – after almost twenty years of mutual recriminations and estrangement since the Cuban Revolution.⁶ As that failed to deliver, in the second half of 1977 the President and his officials undertook a campaign of public rhetorical attacks against the alleged destabilizing and 'neocolonial' role of Cuba's troops. When Cuba intervened in the Horn as well, the prospective normalization was put on the back burner and the rhetorical attacks were scaled up, with the Cubans now regularly

²Fred Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War* (London: Verso, 1986); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War. Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Raymond Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (New York: Brookings Institution Press, 1994), chap. 15 and 19; Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire. The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 2008), 247-258.

³Lars Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 2009), chap. 9-10; William LeoGrande, Peter Kornbluh, *Back Channel to Cuba. The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 2014), chap. 4-5; Elier Ramírez Cañedo, Esteban Morales Domínguez, *De la confrontación a los intentos de 'normalización'. La política de los Estados Unidos hacia Cuba* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 2015), chap. 3-5.

⁴Piero Gleijeses's and Nancy Mitchell's works cited above are used here as standard references.

⁵Jimmy Carter's dilemmas about Cuban troops in Africa feature prominently in most general works about his foreign policy. Among these: Robert Strong, *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2000), chap. 4; Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), chap. 7; Scott Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration* (De Kalb: University of Northern Illinois Press, 2008), chap. 5; Aaron Donaghy, *The Second Cold War: Carter, Reagan, and the Politics of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge UK: CUP, 2023), chap. 1-3.

⁶Mitchell, *Carter*, 81-85 and 167-169.

depicted as ‘puppets’ or ‘mercenaries’ for Moscow.⁷ It is also well known that in a press conference in March 1978, Carter came perilously close to ‘linking’ progress in US-Soviet arms control negotiations to Cuba’s withdrawal from Africa (something he had previously established the administration would not do); shortly thereafter he authorized Brzezinski to speed up the process of normalization with the People’s Republic of China as a way to ‘punish the Soviets and the Cubans’.⁸ Some indirect military aid to anti-government forces in Angola was also ostensibly routed through South Africa.⁹

Based on a wide array of both primary and secondary sources, including declassified documents from US and French archives, this article shows that the Carter administration deployed a complementary, as yet virtually unexplored tactic to try and achieve its goal, by attempting to bring about a diplomatic encirclement of Cuba in the Third World, particularly in the Non-Aligned Movement, of which Havana was scheduled to host the Sixth Summit conference in 1979.¹⁰ The first section below provides some context to the events. The second section shows how, in the second half of 1977 Carter’s NSC began to devise a plan to have major non-aligned countries speaking out against Cuba’s involvement in Africa, under the understanding that their ‘anti-imperialist’ credentials would be greater than those of the US government, and that their criticism would thus be more effective. The following sections account for the adoption of the scheme in the early spring of 1978, its deployment in the late spring and summer, and its apogee at the July NAM ministerial Conference in Belgrade, in the run-up to which the administration even guardedly tried to push its interlocutors to question the appropriateness of Havana as a venue for the Movement’s next Summit. In Belgrade the attempt ended in substantial failure: only a limited number of NAM governments responded favorably to US stimulations, and the Cuban leadership proved impermeable to whatever external pressure was generated by them. The hopes that had given rise to the scheme were not completely abandoned over the following months when the administration crafted its approach to the now inevitable *Cumbre* in Havana, but the Belgrade conference can be considered the practical endpoint of Carter’s attempt to use the NAM as a conduit for his African priorities.

Because the attempt ended in failure, the story told here is not one that changes history as we know it. While troop numbers varied over the years depending on changing contingencies, Havana withdrew its contingents from Africa only at the end of the following decade, when peace treaties were signed, respectively, between Ethiopia and Somalia and between Angola, Cuba, and South Africa. Yet, in its analysis of the developments above, this article documents what appears to have been the only consistent *policy* deployed by the Carter administration, as opposed to simple rhetorical exercise or piecemeal ‘punishments’, to try and achieve Cuba’s withdrawal from Africa after it took bilateral normalization off the table. As such, this article enriches our understanding of

⁷Ibid., 365. A strong rebuttal of the notion that Cuba acted as a Soviet ‘proxy’ is in Piero Gleijeses, ‘Moscow’s Proxy? Cuba and Africa 1975–1988’, *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8, 2 (2006), 3–51. On Cuban-Soviet relations in the 1970s: Mervyn Bain, ‘Havana and Moscow in the 1970s: “Sovietization” in an Era of Détente’, in Emily Kirk, Anna Clayfield, Isabel Story (eds.), *Cuba’s Forgotten Decade. How the 1970s Shaped the Revolution* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019), 23–40.

⁸Mitchell, *Carter*, 395–396 and chap. 11. Other options were also considered but discarded during the final weeks of the fighting in the Horn of Africa. These included revising economic relations with the Soviet Union, deploying an aircraft carrier off the coast of the Horn, asking the Iranian and the Saudi governments to send troops to fight on the Somali side, and asking the Egyptian government to close navigation of the Suez Canal to Cuban and Soviet ships.

⁹Gleijeses, *Visions*, 51–53.

¹⁰Nancy Mitchell alludes to the scheme but does not delve into it: Mitchell, *Carter*, 484.

Carter's approach to one of the issues which defined his presidency and sheds new light both on the administration's policy-making and on its interactions with Cuba. At the same time, the effort was so complex that tracing its history sheds some light also on Carter's approach to the NAM, a field of inquiry in the history of US foreign relations for which a recent authoritative survey has concluded that more 'work remains to be done'.¹¹ In short, this article provides us with new evidence of the degree to which the Carter administration's 'obsession' with Cuba's African ventures – to borrow an apt phrase from historian Piero Gleijeses – was allowed to drive US policy in the late 1970s.

Carter's puzzle: Cuba, Africa, and the Non-Aligned Movement

As scholars of Carter's foreign relations have often pointed out, an inherent tension between transformational aspirations and ingrained 'Cold War' worldviews beset US foreign policy from the beginning of Carter's term, if with incremental consequences that would come into full display only in 1979.¹² The interplay, during 1977, between Carter's concern with Cuba's African engagements and his attempt to normalize US-Cuban bilateral relations offers both an example of this tension and an appropriate starting point for the account of the administration's attempt to change Havana's policy via the NAM.

In early 1977, building upon previous timid moves by the Ford administration, and in reaction to more recent Cuban overtures, Carter announced his intention to open negotiations with the Cuban government to try and solve the long series of disputes that had poisoned the Washington-Havana relationship for nearly two decades. Whether normalization was an objective or a means to something else was, at this stage, quite ambivalent. On the one hand, as the President wrote in his diary, his opening was to be intended as part of his design to 'alleviate tension around the world'¹³; on the other, as the NSC's Presidential Directive no. 6 (PD/NSC-6) of 15 March 1977 clearly stated, offering Havana the prospect of normalization was also a means by which the administration hoped to 'advance the interests of the United States' with respect to issues such as 'Cuba's foreign interventions [...] in Angola and elsewhere'.¹⁴ Be that as it may, between April and September the United States and Cuba agreed on fishing rights in the Florida Straits, initiated a policy of cooperation between their respective coast guards, and began discussions on numerous other dossiers of mutual interest.¹⁵ In September, the two governments opened their respective 'sections of interest' as surrogates of the embassies they had closed in 1961. Later in the year, they allowed the resumption of charter flights, and cultural and sports exchanges.

¹¹Robert Rakove, 'Neutrality/Nonalignment and the United States', in Mark Lawrence (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the History of American Foreign Relations* (Oxford: OUP, 2021), 19 (e-article version).

¹²See footnote no. 5.

¹³Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 27 (entry of 23 February 1977).

¹⁴'PD/NSC-6: Cuba', 15 March 1977, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta (JCL), Vertical File, Presidential Directives 1-20.

¹⁵Detailed factual accounts of US-Cuban relations in the Carter years are in: Schoultz, *That Infernal*, chap. 10; LeoGrande, Kornbluh, *Back Channel*, chap. 5; Ramírez Cañedo, Morales Domínguez, *De la confrontación*, chap. 4-5; Hideaki Kami, 'The Limits of Dialogue: Washington, Havana, and Miami, 1977-1980', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 19, 3 (2017), 4-41; Michael Erisman, 'David Rising: Cuba and Its Northern Goliath in the 1970s', in Kirk, Clayfield, Story (eds.), *Cuba's Forgotten Decade*, 41-54.

The lack of conditions to begin negotiations did not imply that the two governments had no conditions for concluding them. For the Cubans, these were the removal of the economic blockade of the island which Washington had imposed since the early 1960s, and some reparation for the damage suffered by the Cuban economy. In return, the US demanded compensation for US citizens and corporations for the expropriations that had occurred in the context of the agrarian reform and the nationalization of Cuban industry between 1959 and 1961. The discussion of these points, however, never developed in depth, as during the summer the Carter administration determined, after some debate, to link further progress on the road to normalization to Cuba's withdrawal from Angola.¹⁶ By the fall of 1977, as the fighting in the Horn intensified, the administration began to demand the removal of Cuba's military personnel from Ethiopia as well (although, as Nancy Mitchell has shown, by the time the US began to formulate such requests the Cuban presence there was limited to a few hundred instructors to the Ethiopian army).¹⁷ In the face of such demands, the Cuban position was inflexible: since Cuban troops were in Africa at the request of two legitimate governments, and in opposition to overt acts of external aggression against two sovereign states, only Luanda and Addis Ababa had the right to decide on the matter.¹⁸ At the end of the year, the balance of the bilateral dialogue was not negative but US demands, and the increasing US rhetoric depicting Cuba as a Soviet 'stooge', left very little room for further progress.

Compared to his focus on Cuba and Cuban troops in Africa, by the end of 1977 Carter had paid only intermittent and indirect attention to the Non-Aligned Movement. Founded in Belgrade in September 1961 at the initiative of the governments of Yugoslavia, India, Egypt, and Indonesia (with Cuba as its only original Latin American member), in 1977 the NAM boasted some eighty members and a dozen 'observers'. While remaining a relatively little-institutionalized organization, during the 1970s the Movement had set up a coordinating bureau and a schedule for regular intra-summit meetings, and had established that the country hosting its triennial summit would act as its chair and speaker until the next summit.¹⁹ In the wake of the 1973 'oil shock', the activism of the Algerian presidency over North-South economic issues had for some time given the Movement a leading role in shaping the agenda of the Third World and of the international political debate itself, as witnessed by the approval of the resolutions in favor of the New International Economic Order at the United Nations in 1974.²⁰ At the Colombo summit of 1976, Havana had been indicated as the venue for the 1979 summit.

Moving from the President's stated intention to tackle 'the North-South problems of poverty, development, and global well-being', in its first year the Carter administration had displayed some openness to discuss the issues dear to most non-aligned

¹⁶LeoGrande, Kornbluh, *Back Channel*, 166.

¹⁷Mitchell, *Carter*, 344.

¹⁸Fidel Castro, 'Conclusiones', 24 December 1977, <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1977/esp/f241277e.html>.

¹⁹Jürgen Dinkel, *The Non-Aligned Movement: Genesis, Organization and Politics (1927-1992)* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), chap. 5; Chris Aiden, Sally Morphet, Marco Antonio Vieira, *The South in World Politics* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), chap. 2.

²⁰Lorenz M. Lüthi, 'Non-Alignment, 1961-74', in Sandra Bott et al. (eds.), *Neutrality and Neutralism in the Global Cold War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 90-107; Jürgen Dinkel, "'Third world begins to flex its muscles": The Non-Aligned Movement and the North-South conflict during the 1970s', *ibid.*, 108-23; Jeffrey James Byrne, 'Beyond Continents, Colours, and the Cold War: Yugoslavia, Algeria, and the Struggle for Non-Alignment', *International History Review* 37, 5 (2015), 912-32; Giuliano Garavini, 'From Boumediensomics to Reaganomics: Algeria, OPEC, and the International Struggle for Economic Equality', *Humanity* 6, 1 (2015), 79-92.

governments.²¹ Although, admittedly, such openness to dialogue did not imply many concessions to the substance of the New International Economic Order, a year-end balance of the administration's North-South policies by the NSC staff expressed the view that they had at least succeeded in bringing about positive 'dramatic change in the American image in the Third World'.²² Yet, declassified records from the Carter administration indicate that the NAM was not given special consideration as an interlocutor on North-South issues and did not enter the administration's radar in significant ways before 1978.²³ Occasionally, during 1977, the President and other administration officials made positive references in public to what they called the 'nonaligned world' or the 'nonaligned nations'.²⁴ At a dinner honoring Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, Carter once even referred to the 'nonaligned movement' as such, while Vice President Walter Mondale came close to mentioning the NAM in a statement he gave after talks with Yugoslav President Josip Broz 'Tito', where he expressed the administration's 'recognition and admiration for [Tito's] leadership in the nonaligned nations' movement'.²⁵ But all in all, there is not much to suggest a significant shift, at this stage, from the traditional reluctance by US policymakers to engage with the Movement.²⁶ By early 1978, a high-ranking Yugoslav diplomat still complained to the US ambassador in Belgrade that the Carter administration 'never mentions non-alignment' while, under the Ford administration, 'at least [secretary of State Henry] Kissinger used the term, even if in negative [*sic*] sense of third bloc'.²⁷ The claim may have been technically imprecise but remained politically significant.

By the second half of the 1970s, however, the NAM was also a movement under stress. Its institutions had repeatedly proved unable to mediate the ever more frequent military crises that pitted some of its member states against one another, while latent tensions

²¹ Jimmy Carter, 'Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame', 22 May 1977, in American Presidency Project database, www.presidency.ucsb.edu (APP).

²² Thomas Thornton (NSC staff) to Brzezinski, 'Status of North-South Relations', 21 November 1977, JCL, National Security Advisor (NSA), NLC-24-59-2-9-9 (here and henceforth RAC location is used for JCL files). The goals (and the limits) of Carter's openness to the North-South 'dialogue' are spelled out in Michael Franczak, 'Human rights and basic needs: Jimmy Carter's North-South dialogue, 1977-81', *Cold War History* 18, 4 (2018), 447-64; Courtney Hercus, *The Struggle over Human Rights: The Non-Aligned Movement, Jimmy Carter, and Neoliberalism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019); Giuliano Garavini, *After Empires. European Integration, Decolonization, and the Challenge from the Global South 1957-1986* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), chap. 6.

²³ Of course, absence of evidence does not mean evidence of absence, but declassified 'North-South' files at the JCL virtually never mention the NAM over 1977 and 1978 (see JCL, NSA, NLC-7-44, NLC-24-59, NLC-24-64 and NLC-24-101). Two mentions of the NAM of little substance in 'North-South' files can be found on pages 13 and 22 in PRC Work Group, 'US Foreign Policy Goals over the Coming 4-8 Years', no date, JCL, NSA, NLC-24-64-4-1-0. As for the heading 'Non-Aligned Movement', only one folder nominally covering 1977 exists in the National Security Advisor collection (JCL, NSA, NLC-24-58-3), but all the available records in it pertain to 1978.

²⁴ Keyword search in APP database.

²⁵ Respectively: (Carter) 'Toasts of the President and President Sadat at a Dinner Honoring the Egyptian President', 4 April 1977, APP; and (Mondale) 'Statement, Belgrade, 21 May', *State Department Bulletin*, n. 1982, 20 June 1977, 666.

²⁶ Rakove, 'Neutrality/Nonalignment'; Richard Jackson, *The Non-aligned, the UN, and the Superpowers* (Westport: Praeger, 1983). On the US and the non-aligned world in the 1950s and 1960s: Jason Parker, 'Cold War II: The Eisenhower Administration, the Bandung Conference, and the Reperiodization of the Postwar Era', *Diplomatic History*, 30, 5 (2006), 867-892; Robert Rakove, *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Nonaligned World* (Cambridge UK: CUP, 2013); Eric Gettig, "'Trouble Ahead in Afro-Asia': The United States, the Second Bandung Conference, and the Struggle for the Third World, 1964-1965", *Diplomatic History*, 39, 2 (2015), 126-156; Eric Gettig, "'A Propaganda Boon for Us": The Havana Tricontinental Conference and the United States Response', in Joseph Parrott, Mark Lawrence (eds.), *The Tricontinental Revolution. Third World Radicalism and the Cold War* (Cambridge UK: CUP, 2022).

²⁷ US Embassy in Belgrade to State, 'USA Yugoslav consultation', 1 February 1978, in US National Archives, Access to Archival Databases, Electronic Telegrams, <https://aad.archives.gov/> (AAD). On Kissinger's 'Southern strategy': Daniel Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Cambridge USA: HUP, 2015), 175-182.

juxtaposed within its ranks the oil-exporting and the oil-importing members, the ‘conservative’ and the ‘progressive’ states, as well as different champions of alternative routes to ‘development’.²⁸ Philosophically, two camps faced each other: according to the first, headed by Belgrade, ‘non-alignment’ was to be interpreted as an attempt to seek a rigorous ‘equidistance’ between the military-political blocs established around the United States and the Soviet Union; according to the second, expressed mainly by Havana, the search for equidistance at all costs made the Movement dependent on the positioning of others and prevented it from recognizing that in practice its positions tended to coincide most often with those of the socialist bloc.²⁹ In this context, by the second half of 1977, the Carter administration privately started to convey to Yugoslav diplomats the message that its understanding of the dignity of ‘non-alignment’ came with its intention to support the Yugoslav position (which it called ‘moderate’) over the Cuban one (which it called ‘radical’).³⁰

The NAM as a means to drive Cuba out of Africa

The idea that the NAM could be used to bring pressure on Cuba originated, quite paradoxically, with a set of reflections the original aim of which was to speed up the normalization of US-Cuban relations. In August 1977, Robert Pastor, the NSC officer in charge of Latin America, sent a four-page memorandum to Brzezinski. In this he made the point that Cuba was a thorn in the US’ side also because the complete rescission of trade, investment, and diplomatic relations since the early 1960s had left the US with virtually no instruments to influence Havana.³¹ Hence, according to Pastor, the reactivation of bilateral relations was, *ipso facto*, a way to balance Cuba away from the Soviet Union: if the presence of Cuba’s troops in Africa irritated the United States, their withdrawal should not be a condition for normalization, but should rather be promoted indirectly, via pressures coming from the African states themselves (particularly the so-called ‘front-line states’) or from Latin American states enjoying some credibility in the broad Third World context (Pastor mentioned Venezuela, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Colombia).³²

To the extent that it was trying to keep the road to bilateral normalization open, Pastor’s advice was completely ignored. But in mid-November, his ideas took on a second life. With Somali forces still on the offensive in the Horn, and even though Havana was still responding in the negative to Ethiopian requests for direct military engagement, administration officials began a ‘verbal barrage’ against Cuba’s activism in Africa on

²⁸Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations. A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2008).

²⁹Dinkel, *The Non-Aligned*, chap. 5; Archibald Singham, Shirley Hune, *Non-alignment in an Age of Alignments* (New York: Zed Books, 1981); Vladimir Petrović, ‘Havana 1979: Labudova pesma Titove lične diplomatije [Havana 1979: The Swan Song of Tito’s Personal Diplomacy]’, in Olga Manojlović Pintar (ed.), *Tito: viđenja i tumačenja [Tito: Views and Interpretations]* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2011), 416-35; Germán Albuquerque, ‘Cuba en el Movimiento de Países No Alineados: el camino al liderazgo’, *Caravelle* 109 (2017), 179-93; Michelle Getchell, ‘Cuba, the USSR, and the Non-Aligned Movement. Negotiating Non-Alignment’, in Thomas Field, Stella Krepp, Vanni Pettinà (eds.), *Latin America and the Global Cold War* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2020), 148-72.

³⁰US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1977-80, Vol. XX* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2015) (*FRUS*, followed by volume number and, upon first citation, publication year), doc. 244, President’s Meeting with Edvard Kardelj (Member of the Presidency of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), 30 September 1977.

³¹Pastor to Brzezinski, ‘Your Lunch with Senator Church: Cuba’, JCL, NSA, NLC 15-8-1-1-5.

³²*Ibid.*

major media outlets.³³ The President's staff ostensibly even toyed for a while with the possibility that Carter dedicate an entire speech to denounce Cuba's military involvement in Africa, an idea which the NSC staff successfully opposed on the grounds that it would reveal 'an obsession [...] totally out of proportion with reality' and that it would have been imprudent for the US to 'rant, without effect, about Cuban troops'.³⁴ As an alternative to 'ranting', in a memorandum to Brzezinski, Pastor reiterated his view that 'the only way to obtain a reduction of the Cuban presence in Africa is to concentrate on Africa and on the court of international public opinion': if the US could convince some Third World leader – Pastor mentioned Jamaica's Michael Manley this time – that Cuban troops were detrimental to African stability, that 'could be a powerful lever on Castro'.³⁵ As a follow-through, Pastor even asked the CIA to monitor Latin American governments' reactions to Cuba's involvement in Africa.³⁶ It soon turned out that 'unfortunately' the CIA had not detected any particular concern in Latin American capitals, but the NSC officer insisted that 'the argument against Cuban neocolonialism [*sic*] would be much more effectively made by a Third World nation than by the US, and, particularly if it could be done by Jamaica, Venezuela, Peru or Mexico – all of whom [*sic*] possess good Third World, leftist credentials'.³⁷

By early 1978, Pastor's idea received a boost from the NAM's schedule, as the Movement began preparations for the Belgrade ministerial Conference that marked its most important meeting before the Summit scheduled in Havana in 1979. One diplomatic cable from the US section of interests in Havana, for example, reported the belief held by Romanian diplomats in Cuba that 'the Cubans have interest in moving toward Ethiopian political solution expeditiously so as not to jeopardize 1979 Havana Non-Aligned Summit which Castro regards as important [*sic*] demonstration of Cuban prestige'.³⁸ Although other US contacts within the NAM disagreed with such interpretation, the notion that Cuba's bid for leadership in the NAM could be used as a lever began to be considered seriously.³⁹

It also appears that by this time US officials began to notice that 'the Cubans are putting great effort into this meeting'.⁴⁰ While recounting the story of Cuba's approach to the NAM goes beyond the scope of this essay, it must not have been difficult, from the offices of the recently opened US Section of Interests on Havana's *Malecón*, to receive signals of Cuba's commitment to a successful summit: the construction of the *Palacio de Convenciones*, designed by Cuban 'starchitect' Antonio Quintana Simonetti, certainly did not go unnoticed, while the island's press carried regular updates on Cuba's activities in

³³Mitchell, *Carter*, 343.

³⁴Pastor to Brzezinski, 'Cuba and Africa', 19 November 1977, JCL, NSA, NLC-24-11-4-4-4; (NSC staffer) Henry Richardson to Brzezinski, 'Proposed Presidential Speech on Cuba in Africa', 19 November 1977, JCL, NSA, NLC-24-11-4-6-2.

³⁵Pastor to Brzezinski, 'Cuba and Africa', 19 November 1977, JCL, NSA, NLC-24-11-4-4-4.

³⁶Pastor to Brzezinski, 'Latin American Reaction to Recent Cuban Activities in Africa', 16 January 1978, JCL, NSA, NLC-24-11-6-15-1. The (excised) CIA report is 'Latin American Reaction to Recent Cuban Activities in Africa', 4 January 1978, JCL, NSA, NLC-6-13-3-9-9.

³⁷Pastor to Brzezinski, 'Latin American Reaction to Recent Cuban Activities in Africa', 16 January 1978, JCL, NSA, NLC-24-11-6-15-1.

³⁸US Section of Interests in Havana (USINT) to State, 'Ethiopian Somali Hostilities', 25 January 1978, AAD. A similar reading of Cuban attitudes by a Yugoslav diplomat is in US Embassy in Belgrade to State, 'USA Yugoslav consultation', 1 February 1978, AAD.

³⁹A skeptical view from a Yugoslav diplomat in Havana was reported in USINT to State, 'Cuban Participation in Ethiopian-Somali Conflict', 27 January 1978, AAD.

⁴⁰FRUS, Vol. XVII/1, doc. 77, McGiffert to Brown, 6 April 1978.

the NAM.⁴¹ In February, the prestigious weekly *Bohemia* had also begun to dedicate two pages in each new issue, in strict alphabetical order from Afghanistan onwards, to a member country of the 'vigorous Movement' which would celebrate its summit 'in the great event in Havana' of the following year.⁴²

This enthusiasm displayed a desire for success that exposed Havana to US maneuvers. On 28 February 1978, Pastor wrote to Brzezinski that whereas 'historically the US [had] been distant or hostile to the non-aligned movement', the administration should instead 'begin communicating with receptive or potentially receptive members of the non-aligned in an effort to influence the direction of the non-aligned conference' and should 'brief them on events in the Horn [of Africa] and encourage skepticism about whether Cuba can realistically consider itself nonaligned when it is fighting the Soviet Union's wars'.⁴³ Perhaps because of its militant tone, this message was received enthusiastically by Brzezinski, who was fuming as he saw most of his proposals to deal with Cuba's involvement in the Horn of Africa opposed by Vance and other principals in the NSC, and then discarded by the President, for being too 'hawkish'.⁴⁴ On 3 March, the National Security Advisor wrote to the President that he was working on a set of 'new proposals designed to put greater pressure on Cuba in the various non-aligned bodies with which Cuba is associated'.⁴⁵

In the first week of March, Carter thus found on his desk two preparatory memoranda for the meetings he would have a few days later with Tito at the White House. Vance's memorandum only noted that the NAM was subject to 'tensions' and stated that 'we should indicate that we respect Yugoslavia's policy of nonalignment and Tito as a founder of that movement'.⁴⁶ Brzezinski's memo, on the other hand, suggested that the President exploit Tito's intention to discuss the NAM to 'seek his moderating influence on [...] the next meeting of the Movement in Havana, where Cuba wants a clear success'.⁴⁷ Following the National Security Advisor's script, as would happen more and more often over the next three years, Carter raised the issue in his 9 March meeting with Tito, wondering aloud if Havana was the most appropriate venue for the summit of 1979.⁴⁸

It is worth dedicating a few lines to the exchange between the two presidents. Tito's response to Carter's question, as from Yugoslav records, was: 'Cuba concerns us too, but what can we do?'.⁴⁹ As future events would show, the US administration easily convinced itself that such a response was an invitation to cooperate in an

⁴¹The frequency with which the Cuban daily *Granma* reported about the NAM throughout 1977 and 1978 can easily be verified at the Granma Archive Index database of the University of Texas, at <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/granma/>. An analysis of the rationale for Cuba's bid for leadership in the NAM is in Albuquerque, 'Cuba'.

⁴²'Afghanistan', *Bohemia*, 17 February 1978, 64. The weekly publication of such country profiles eventually went beyond the Havana Summit, as the new members which the Summit itself had accepted were also introduced to the public in late 1979.

⁴³Pastor to Brzezinski, 'Latin America and the Horn: Re-visited', 28 February 1978, JCL, NSA, NLC-6-45-6-1-9.

⁴⁴See footnote 8. A detailed account of the NSC's often 'brutal' meetings on the crisis in the Horn is in Mitchell, *Carter*, 380-400.

⁴⁵*FRUS*, Vol. XVII/1 (2016), doc. 66, Brzezinski to Carter, 'The Soviet Union and Ethiopia', 3 March 1978.

⁴⁶*FRUS*, Vol. XX, doc. 252, Vance to Carter, 'State Visit to the United States by President Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia', undated (March 1978).

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, doc. 251, Brzezinski to Carter, 'Meetings with President Tito', 3 March 1978.

⁴⁸'Nastavak razgovora 9.iii.1978' (March 1978), Arhiv Jugoslavije, Belgrade (AJ), Kabinet Predsednik Republike (KPR), K-87, 1-2-a/73-1, Zabeleške o razgovorima.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

anti-Cuban effort. Indeed, to some extent, this matched Tito's intentions, as many diplomatic exchanges between Washington and Belgrade would confirm in the following months. Yet, the Yugoslav preparatory documents for the meeting show that Belgrade was not naïve about the new American interest in the NAM: this was appreciated to the degree that it was a recognition of Tito's role in the world and as a discontinuity from the 'policies of frontal opposition' of the Nixon and Ford administrations; but it was also regarded as part of a quite open attempt at *divide et impera*, which threatened the unity of the Movement to which Yugoslav diplomacy was wholeheartedly committed.⁵⁰ There is no evidence in US records that dividing the NAM was an objective *per se* for the administration. And yet, taking advantage of the movement's inner tensions was indeed what Carter was setting out to do. From this perspective, when Tito confided to Carter, Brzezinski, and Vance that he was aware that 'there were many attempts to divide the Non-Aligned' and that 'they *all* had to be rejected', it is possible that he was implicitly warning his interlocutors about the limits of their prospective collaboration with him, rather than manifesting complete adherence to their logic.⁵¹ In any case, the senior ranks of the administration came out of the conversation believing they had received the necessary encouragement for similar attempts with other governments.

In the days immediately following Tito's visit, interest grew in Washington for the idea that the key to forcing Cuba out of Africa lay in orchestrating pressure on the Non-Aligned Movement, either through direct criticism of Cuba's African initiatives or through broader criticism of its credentials as a leader or even as a member of the NAM. On 23 March, one NSC official wrote to Brzezinski that 'to induce Castro—in a positive way—to reduce his presence in Africa [...] [p]erhaps actions toward the non-aligned nations would be one possibility', as it could show that the administration was 'ready and able to challenge his 'leadership' of the Third World'.⁵² A few days later, a Pentagon official expressed the same ideas in a lengthy paper addressed to Defense Secretary Harold Brown, adding that the schedule of NAM meetings dictated 'rapid consideration': 'we would like to see the NAM address the issue [of Cuba's African activities] and Cuba's credentials as a non-aligned state be brought under concerted attack'.⁵³ To that end, the memorandum continued, the US should contact a number of 'friendly' governments – Yugoslavia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and Liberia were mentioned this time – with a 'rubric' of talking points according to which 'the credibility of the NAM [was] seriously threatened by Cuba's actions as the Soviets' military surrogate. [...]. Silence on Cuba's actions implie[d] support. This would bring into question NAM's role in larger issues and in the end could endanger public support in the US for progress on North-South issues'.⁵⁴ Taking the talking points to their conclusions, US diplomats should then 'suggest that Summit Conference consider putting Horn of Africa

⁵⁰'Informacija o Sjedinjenim Americским Drzavama i o Jugoslovensko-Americkim odnosima', March 1978, AJ, KPR, I-2-a/73-1, Put J.B. Tita u SAD, 6-9.iii.1978.

⁵¹'Nastavak razgovora 9.iii.1978' (March 1978), AJ, KPR, K-87, I-2-a/73-1, Zabeleške o razgovorima. Italics added. This possible nuance was apparently also lost on the editors of the (otherwise excellent) *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII (2016), who have taken for granted that Tito's reference was to Cuba only (see the 'Editorial note' at doc. 255).

⁵²*FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, doc. 28, Inderfurth to Brzezinski and Aaron, 23 March 1978.

⁵³*FRUS*, Vol. XVII/1, doc. 77, McGiffert to Brown, 6 April 1978.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

on the agenda, indicate its disapproval publicly, reconsider Cuba's credentials to be a member of the NAM, or reevaluate having the 1979 summit in Havana'.⁵⁵

From theory to practice (April-May 1978)

At the beginning of April, Brzezinski sent to the President a memorandum suggesting that in order to pressure Cuba out of Africa the US should 'encourage the Yugoslavs and Algerians who are questioning Cuba's non-aligned credentials — something that apparently troubles the Cubans significantly'. The President approved.⁵⁶ On 7 April, the Special Coordinating Committee of the NSC convened to discuss the Horn of Africa, Angola, and Rhodesia (Ethiopia's internal conflict with Eritrean insurgents and the liberation struggle in Rhodesia being two further conflicts where Carter administration officials feared the Cubans could intervene). On that occasion, Brzezinski announced that the President had decided to proceed with:

[a]mbassadorial demarches in capitals of countries significant in the non-aligned movement pointing out the fact that all-out Cuban support for a military solution in Eritrea is contrary to non-aligned principles [and] [c]onsultation with the Yugoslavs, Algerians, Indians, Indonesians and Libyans on Eritrea with an aim to bringing pressure on the Cubans to desist from involvement (as inconsistent with their status in the non-aligned movement) and perhaps to develop a mediation effort to promote a negotiated solution.⁵⁷

It is noticeable that the list of 'influential' countries on which the US should have exerted its pressure tended to change with extreme frequency, possibly showing some confusion among US policy planners.⁵⁸ Be that as it may, in mid-April 1978 Under-Secretary of State Warren Christopher sent a lengthy circular telegram to all US diplomatic posts in Non-Aligned countries, carrying specific instructions for each mission and particularly for the posts located in the twenty-five members of the Non-Aligned Coordinating Committee (NACC) that was to meet in May in Kabul. After emphasizing that the administration was willing to 'understand the concerns of the NAM' and to 'discuss, in an atmosphere of mutual respect, those issues that still divide us', the message expressed the State Department's particular interest for

the still largely below-the-surface controversy over Cuba's adherence to NAM principles. We know that some members are concerned about Cuba's military intervention alongside the Soviets in Ethiopia. Some have predicted that this concern would surface at Kabul [...]. To extent you believe it appropriate with your government, we would be interested in views on whether NAM proposes approach any of issues in Africa which currently are used to justify presence of foreign forces.⁵⁹

Given the absence, in the Carter Presidential Library and the digital database of declassified State department cables, of any significant file about the Non-Aligned Movement

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶FRUS, Vol. I (2014), doc. 73. Brzezinski to Carter, 7 April 1978 (the President's handwritten approval is 'certified' in footnote 8 to the document).

⁵⁷FRUS XVIII/1, doc. 79, Summary of Conclusions of a Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 7 April 1978.

⁵⁸Robert Pastor virtually admitted as much in May, as he demanded that the regional specialists in the NSC staff meet to indicate 'which countries we should use and which arguments would be more effective': Pastor to Inderfurth, 11 May 1978, JCL, NSA, NLC-24-58-3-1-7.

⁵⁹Christopher to Nonaligned Movement Collective (NMC), 'Multilateral Affairs', 15 April 1978, AAD.

over the first half of 1978, except those related to this diplomatic operation, Carter's engagement with the Movement for that period appears strikingly instrumental. And yet it still required a substantial investment of time and energy. The effort was not limited to US missions abroad. President Carter himself presented the US' case in his correspondence with some foreign leaders.⁶⁰ And Brzezinski took it personally on himself, during his first trip to Beijing, where he would advance the process of normalization with the People's Republic of China, to suggest that the Chinese leadership lobby their own friends within the NAM 'to expose the role of Cuba as a Soviet agent'.⁶¹

In reality, the responses from NAM members were far from enthusiastic. With few exceptions, foreign diplomats and officials assured their US colleagues that they did share their concerns, but regularly found some reason for not taking a stand against Cuba's activities in Africa or, more broadly, its position in the NAM. For example, according to US records, the Peruvian Foreign Minister told Vance that 'if Egypt initiate[d] the discussion about Cuba's activities in Africa, Peru would support them [but] it would be difficult for Peru or other Latin American countries to initiate such a discussion without being branded a surrogate of the US'.⁶² Similarly, during a meeting with the US ambassador, the President of Sri Lanka, then serving as the Movement's chair, assailed the Cubans as 'mercenaries in Africa' but then he left it to 'the Yugoslavs and others [to] help'.⁶³ As for the possibility to move the Summit away from Havana, even fewer governments seemed to prove receptive, and the Yugoslavs and Indians clearly opposed the idea, the latter also taking the clear position that 'assistance in clear cases of aggression' could not be condemned.⁶⁴ All in all, in mid-May Secretary Vance was lamenting that 'the list of non-aligned states which are prepared to take a strong position on the Cuban issue is not encouraging'.⁶⁵ Yet the administration decided not to relent and 'to target 10–12 countries where an approach could be most beneficial in bringing pressure on Cuba'.⁶⁶ If anything, while being promoted by Brzezinski, this effort seemed at least acceptable to Vance, and, in a sense, it offered each the possibility to bridge some of the distance which had clearly emerged between them in late February and early March.⁶⁷

On 30 April, the seizure of power by the Communist Party in Kabul and the ensuing days of uncertainty in Afghanistan allowed Havana to volunteer successfully as an alternative emergency venue for the upcoming NACC. For US diplomats, the meeting, which ran from 15 to 20 May, thus became a rehearsal of the prospective summit of the following year.⁶⁸ While trying to keep a 'low profile', Washington mobilized its Section of

⁶⁰FRUS, Vol. XIX (2019), doc. 102, Carter to Indian Prime Minister Morarji Desai, 9 May 1978.

⁶¹FRUS, Vol. XIII (2013), doc. 108, Brzezinski's meeting with Foreign Minister Huang Hua, 20 May 1978.

⁶²FRUS, Vol. XXIV, doc. 310, 'Peruvian Consultations', 8 May 1978.

⁶³FRUS, Vol. XIX, doc. 477, Telegram from the US Embassy in Colombo to State, 16 May 1978.

⁶⁴National Foreign Assessment Center, 'International Issues Monthly Review', 26 July 1978, in CIA Records Search Tool, www.cia.gov/readingroom/ (CREST). Only Somalia, Egypt and Zaire were clearly against holding the Summit in Havana, though some governments did declare, either in public or in private conversations with US diplomats, that they were considering not attending the summit. See, for example, US Embassy in Abu Dhabi to State, 'Multilateral Affairs', 9 May 1978, AAD.

⁶⁵FRUS, Vol. XVII, doc. 82, Summary of Conclusions of a Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 15 May 1978.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷An ostensibly 'definitive' list of countries which 'might be receptive to a briefing on Cuban interventionist activities' was provided by State's Peter Tarnoff to Brzezinski, 'Briefing for selected Non-Aligned Nations', 25 May 1978, JCL, NSA, NLC-24-58-3-15-2. It included Algeria, Egypt, India, Gabon, Guyana, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tanzania and Yugoslavia.

⁶⁸USINT to State, 'Cuba to Host NACC Meeting', 5 May 1978, AAD.

Interests in Havana to ‘continue discreetly to assure NAM ‘moderates’ of [US] support for their efforts to define the NAM as a viable, successful – and Non-Aligned – voice for the Third World’.⁶⁹

In reality, for US diplomats, neither supporting the ‘moderates’, nor keeping a low profile proved easy in Havana. As was customary in NAM meetings, diplomats from non-members only had limited access to the conference area, while Cuban security services kept a close watch on them.⁷⁰ In any case, US efforts led to very little results. The final communiqué from the Havana meeting condemned the United States and ‘imperialism’ in stronger terms than previous NAM documents, both in its ‘philosophical’ part and over specific issues ranging from the blockade of Cuba’s economy to the Middle East negotiations.⁷¹ Several influential NAM members also ostensibly appreciated the Cuban hosts for their ability to compromise when their positions did not meet the general consensus.⁷² According to dispatches from Havana to the State Department, few countries formally filed reservations to the final communiqué, none criticized Cuba and none defended the US from Cuban criticism.⁷³ One dispatch concluded that the meeting had been a great success for the Cubans and that ‘while Yugoslavs, Indians and other [*sic*] played moderating role, meeting revealed that Non-Aligned Movement is a weak reed on which to lean if we wish to place international political pressure on Cuba’.⁷⁴

Within the State Department, some skepticism surfaced vis-à-vis the ‘globalist’ strategy conceived in the NSC, with high-ranking officials telling Secretary Vance that US efforts ‘to encourage members of the Non-Alignment Movement to criticize Cuba’ had not been very successful because ‘many African states [did] not consider Cuban assistance illegitimate when requested to defend territorial integrity’.⁷⁵ In his own evaluation of the NACC, Secretary Vance recognized that ‘there was no sign of a revolt of the moderates about the pattern of Cuban-Soviet intervention in Africa. On the contrary, the Yugoslavs and other moderates consciously avoided raising these questions so as not to disrupt the meeting’.⁷⁶ Yet, despite what may have been regarded as a setback, senior officials in the administration decided to see the glass as half full: back from Beijing, Brzezinski lauded the Chinese for being ‘scathing in their condemnation of the Cuban role in Africa [and] responsive to my suggestions that the Cubans be exposed in the nonaligned movement’.⁷⁷ For his part, Vance told Carter that, while the US could not ‘force a change in Soviet and Cuban policies in Africa’, what he described as ‘Iraqi, Syrian, and Algerian pressures against the Soviets and Cubans in Eritrea’ may have occurred as a result of recent US diplomatic efforts.⁷⁸ A few days later, in a major foreign policy

⁶⁹US Mission at the United Nations (USUN) to USINT, ‘Non-Aligned Coordinating Bureau (NACB) Havana Meeting’, 16 May 1978, AAD.

⁷⁰USINT to State, ‘Non-Aligned Conference’, 17 May 1978, AAD.

⁷¹The communiqué from the Havana meeting is attached to ‘Nota verbal’, 7 June 1978, United Nations Digital Library, <https://digitallibrary.un.org> (UNDL), A_33_118-ES.

⁷²US Embassy in Colombo to State, ‘Sri Lanka Foreign Minister A.C.S. Hameed’s Statement’, 23 May 1978, AAD; USUN to State, ‘Tanzania PERMREP’s Views’, 24 May 1978, AAD; USUN to State, ‘Indian Diplomats’ Views’, 30 May 1978, AAD.

⁷³USINT to State, ‘Non-Aligned Conference Closes’, 23 May 1978, AAD; USINT to State, ‘Non-Aligned Conference’, 24 May 1978, AAD; USINT to State, ‘Non-Aligned Conference’, 26 May 1978, AAD.

⁷⁴USINT to State, ‘Non-Aligned Conference Closes’, 23 May 1978, AAD.

⁷⁵FRUS, Vol. XXIII, doc. 32, Memorandum to Vance, 26 May 1978.

⁷⁶Vance to All Diplomatic Posts, ‘Multilateral Affairs’, 6 June 1978, AAD.

⁷⁷FRUS, Vol. XIII, doc. 113, Brzezinski to Carter, 25 May 1978.

⁷⁸FRUS, Vol. I (2014), doc. 82, Vance to Carter, 29 May 1978. That the Cubans intended to fight in Eritrea was Vance’s own guess. Also: FRUS, Vol. XXIII, doc. 31, USINT to the Department of State, 15 May 1978.

speech, Carter assured an audience in Annapolis that ‘many countries [were] becoming very concerned that the nonaligned movement is being subverted by Cuba, which is obviously closely aligned with the Soviet Union and dependent upon the Soviets for economic sustenance and for military and political guidance and direction’.⁷⁹ The attempt to use the NAM to convey US recriminations against Cuba thus went public.

The Cuban reaction to US behavior was indignant. Foreign Minister Isidoro Malmierca opened the NACC in Havana with a sharp denunciation of ‘imperialist’ attempts at dividing the NAM and, after the end of the meeting, Cuban diplomats complained in private with their US counterparts that the US had attempted to ‘sabotage’ it.⁸⁰ As we will see, this would not be the last time that the word ‘sabotage’ would be used in this story. Whether encouraging NACC participants to question their host’s credentials and the appropriateness of Havana as a venue for the next Summit of the Movement qualified as ‘sabotage’ may ultimately depend on subjective scales of judgment. In any case, the Cubans showed they were particularly sensitive to US meddling.⁸¹ This, in turn, encouraged the Carter administration to persist with its attempts.

Belgrade and Its Aftermath

It was against this background that the drama moved towards Belgrade, where, from 25 to 30 July, the NAM’s full membership would hold its next ministerial conference. Throughout the weeks leading to this more important meeting, Malmierca visited dozens of countries to consolidate the Cuban position.⁸² But US diplomats were also busy restating their points with as many ‘moderates’ as they could, which they did with very detailed instructions from Washington.⁸³ In the slightly derisive account of a French diplomat for the Quai d’Orsay, the US approach entailed nothing less than ‘an all-out feverish agitation’.⁸⁴ Again, the President was personally involved. For example, Carter told a group of Central American and Caribbean heads of government, not all of them NAM members, that

the Non-Aligned Movement could be much more helpful if it were much more independent than it is right now. The U.S. feels that it is being captured more and more by the Cubans. By no stretch of the imagination can Cuba realistically be considered a non-aligned country. If the Non-Aligned Movement is to keep its independence and its objectiveness, then it must consider which path it will take in the future.⁸⁵

In US records, it is quite rare to find the kind of prescriptive language adopted by the President on that occasion. Indeed, the State Department instructed its missions abroad

⁷⁹FRUS, Vol. I, doc. 87, ‘Address by President Carter’, 7 June 1978.

⁸⁰USUN to State, ‘Non-Aligned Movement’, 21 June 1978, AAD; and State to All Diplomatic Posts, ‘Multilateral Affairs’, 28 June 1978, AAD. Cuban diplomats cited as evidence a *New York Times* article which briefly described US diplomats’ activism in Havana: David Binder, ‘Unity of Non-Aligned Undergoing Strains’, *New York Times*, 11 June 1978.

⁸¹Also see National Intelligence Daily Cable, 18 July 1978, CREST.

⁸²In Cuba, Malmierca’s travels were duly reported on *Granma*. According to French sources, Malmierca and his collaborators visited 43 countries in the weeks before Belgrade: French Ambassador in Cuba to Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA), ‘Cuba et la conférence ministérielle des pays non alignés’, 2 August 1978, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, La Courneuve (AMAE), Série Europe (SE), 1976-1980, 4836, Yougoslavie, You-11-1 (You-11-1).

⁸³Christopher to NMC, ‘Multilateral Affairs’, 14 Jul 1978, AAD.

⁸⁴Direction des Nations Unies et Organisations Internationales, ‘Non-alignment’, 10 August 1978, AMAE, SE, 1976-1980, 4836, Y.

⁸⁵FRUS, Vol. III (2013), doc. 306, Summary of Multilateral Meeting in Panama, 17 June 1978.

to ‘tailor our activities so as not to give credibility to a charge that we are intervening in NAM affairs’.⁸⁶ Thus, the picture of US activities that seems to emerge from US records is rather one where Washington tried to play a maieutic role for the ‘moderates’ to speak out in Belgrade, telling each of them that they were not alone and, in a sense, coordinating them from behind. For example, in a meeting at the White House with Indian Prime Minister Morarji Desai, after Carter had raised the issue of Cuban activities in Africa, Brzezinski immediately asked what were the criteria for membership in the NAM. It was apparently left to the Indian side to decide how to interpret the question, although we can doubt that it was a wholly disinterested one.⁸⁷ In any case, even the French embassy in Washington described the State Department as ‘not having spared any efforts, acting bilaterally [. . .] with practically each of the participants’.⁸⁸

Throughout the run-up to the Belgrade meeting, consultation and coordination with the Yugoslavs were close, and the Carter administration even received in advance the draft of the meeting’s final communiqué.⁸⁹ Indeed, there is abundant evidence that the struggle for leadership between Yugoslavia and Cuba had become particularly lively at this stage.⁹⁰ Cooperation with the Yugoslav authorities, and the information collected in NAM capitals, allowed US top officials to hope for a short while that, even though Yugoslavia and India would likely keep their criticism of Cuba indirect, Belgrade might provide the occasion for other ‘moderates’ to attack Cuba directly. In its pre-conference instructions for US diplomats, the State Department informed them that ‘of the anti-Cuban initiatives expected at Belgrade, an Egyptian proposal to adjourn the Havana NAM summit (September 1979) sine die probably has the widest potential appeal. There are also Somali and Zairian proposals to expel Cuba from the NAM [. . .] and indications are that a fair number of the moderates are prepared to support one or both of these proposals’.⁹¹ To ‘strengthen the hands of the moderates’, upon Yugoslavia’s request and Brzezinski’s suggestion, Carter even made the unprecedented gesture, for a US President, of sending a well-wishing message on behalf of the US government to the foreign ministers in Belgrade.⁹²

It appears, however, that US diplomacy overestimated both the popularity of the anti-Cuban proposals and the disposition of the Yugoslavs to host a divisive meeting. Early evidence to the contrary came at a Summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Khartoum convened immediately before Belgrade, where the Somali and Egyptian demands were rebuffed by the vast majority of participants. (Of course, the very idea of discussing NAM membership at an OAU summit was judged inappropriate).⁹³ As far as Tito was concerned, the elderly statesman would indeed try to impress his understanding

⁸⁶Christopher to NMC, ‘Multilateral Affairs’, 14 July 1978, AAD.

⁸⁷FRUS, Vol. XIX, doc. 104, Memorandum of conversation between Carter and Desai, 14 June 1978.

⁸⁸French Embassy in Washington to MFA, ‘Premiers commentaires américains’, 3 August 1978, AMAE, SE, 1976-1980, 4836, You-11-1.

⁸⁹Christopher to NMC, ‘Multilateral Affairs’, 14 July 1978, AAD.

⁹⁰Dinkel, *The Non-Aligned*, chap. 5. The Cuban-Yugoslav rivalry would indeed be one of the main themes of the NAM’s inner relations throughout 1979.

⁹¹Christopher to NMC, ‘Multilateral Affairs’, 14 July 1978, AAD.

⁹²The message, directed to the Yugoslav Foreign Minister and conference chair Iosip Vrhovec, is in State to US Embassy in Belgrade (USBEL), 24 July 1978, AAD. Also: Pastor to Brzezinski and Aaron, 18 July 1978, JCL, NSA, NLC-24-58-3-4-4.

⁹³US Embassy in Khartoum to State, ‘OAU Summit’, 24 July 1978, AAD; State to OAU Collective, ‘OAU Summit’, 24 July 1978, AAD.

of non-alignment on the Belgrade meeting, by opening it in person, but keeping the Movement's unity remained his main concern. As an experienced Yugoslav diplomat assured the US ambassador in Belgrade: 'anyone who attempts to expel Cuba from the Movement must be a 'Cuban agent', since this would only force the other states to rally to Cuba's defense'. The same diplomat added that such a move would not only be 'counter-productive and futile' but also 'wrong': Cuba was a non-aligned state, 'one of the founders, an active member', and thus expulsion 'would not be in accordance with [non-alignment] principles'.⁹⁴ On the eve of the meeting, the US ambassador cabled to Washington that despite the excitement of the previous weeks 'indications from delegates with whom we have spoken are that there will be no major donnybrook in Belgrade over Cuba's role in the Movement'.⁹⁵

If the NACC in Havana had been a clear failure for US diplomacy, the Belgrade meeting was a more complex affair. In his opening speech, on 25 July, while careful not to attack Cuba directly, Tito did not refrain from criticizing what he called the 'new forms of colonial presence or of bloc dependence, foreign influence and domination', which he saw 'primarily in Africa'.⁹⁶ During the conference sessions, more direct attacks on Cuba reportedly came from Somalia, Egypt, Zaire, Morocco, Oman, and Kampuchea, while Egypt, Somalia, and Zaire officially demanded the postponement of the Havana Summit.⁹⁷ A contentious paragraph in the draft communiqué, originally condemning all external intervention in NAM countries, was amended and re-written several times, first to make an exception for the external interventions requested by legitimate governments and then to introduce further qualifications, before the ministers decided to drop it altogether.⁹⁸ But the fact that it had been considered in the first place shows that the challenges to Cuba had multiplied in the two years since the unanimous acclamation of its intervention on Angola's behalf at the Colombo Summit.

Of course, it is difficult to tell whether US prodding and encouragement had any role in determining such a climate, but both the US government and the Cuban government liked to believe that this was the case. A few days after the end of the meeting, Carter told the NSC that 'the Soviets have lost esteem in the non-aligned movement' as they now had 'the onus of being intruders, especially in Africa with the Cubans', and he confidently took pride for 'hav[ing] done part of the job and hav[ing] had a net gain on this'.⁹⁹ This judgment seems somewhat self-serving: if anything, Iosip Vrhovec, the Yugoslav Foreign minister and conference chair in Belgrade, seemed to disagree when, at about the same time, he told the West German foreign minister that while his government was generally satisfied with the outcome of the conference 'the disservice of American propaganda, which proclaimed that Cuba was not an independent country' had been a 'complicating

⁹⁴USBEL to State, 'Havana-Belgrade NAM Conferences', 20 July 1978, AAD.

⁹⁵USBEL to State, 'Belgrade Non-Aligned Conference', 26 July 1978, AAD.

⁹⁶'Statement by his Excellency Josip Broz Tito', 25 July 1978, attached (Annex IV) to Letter from the Yugoslav Chargé d'affaires to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, 6 September 1978, UNDL, A_33_206-EN.

⁹⁷Stephen Miller, *Associated Press*, 28 July 1978; USBEL to State, 'Non-Aligned Conference', 30 July 1978, AAD; French Chargé in Belgrade, to MFA, 'Conférence ministérielle des pays non alignés', 1 August 1978, AMAE, SE, 1976-1980, 4836, You-11-1.

⁹⁸David Andelman, 'Non-Aligned Threatened by Division', *Globe and Mail*, 31 July 1978. A more detailed account is in French Chargé in Belgrade to MFA, 'Conférence ministérielle des pays non alignés', 1 August 1978, AMAE, SE, 1976-1980, 4836, You-11-1.

⁹⁹FRUS, Vol. I, doc. 94, Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting, 15 August 1978.

factor [which had] led to stronger support for Cuba than it received as a result of its policies'.¹⁰⁰

To be sure, while conceding that Cuba had been put on the defensive for the first time, close observers of the NAM, including US diplomats, were not so sure that Belgrade had been such a success for Carter. After all, direct criticism of Cuba had been raised by a group of states which Malmierca could easily dismiss as an 'unqualified minority'. (Some, such as Zaire and Somalia, were notorious outcasts in the Movement, and Egypt itself was now under growing scrutiny for its negotiations with Israel, which many suspected could lead to a sell-out of the Palestinian cause).¹⁰¹ Belgrade's final communiqué dropped some of the rhetoric of the Havana NACC and, in the introductory paragraphs concerning the nature of non-alignment, had 'hegemony' (which many interpreted as a diplomatic codeword for the Soviet Union) criticized next to 'imperialism' (which was traditionally reserved for the US and the West Europeans). This ostensibly reflected the capacity of the Yugoslavs and the other 'moderates' to have their conception of non-alignment more clearly stated in the document.

But no direct criticism of Cuba's African involvement appeared in the communiqué. If there had ever been the possibility that Egyptian and Somali demands would make an impact in Belgrade, Tito himself had made sure to nip it in the bud, by solemnly stating in his opening speech that the next Summit of the Movement would indeed be held in Havana.¹⁰² Further, in the paragraphs dedicated to the review of actual world politics, the US still came out badly scarred, with criticism and condemnations concerning its 'continuing pressures and threats' against Cuba, its 'attempts to liquidate the Palestinian cause', its 'collusion with South Africa's racist regime', its 'political or repressive manoeuvres to perpetuate Puerto Rico's colonial status' and, in a slightly veiled formulation, its negotiating tactics 'to delay the achievement of the objectives' of the New International Economic Order.¹⁰³ The harsh treatment reserved for the US, even harsher than in the Havana NACC on sensitive issues like the US role in Egyptian-Israeli negotiations, appeared particularly shocking in the light of Carter's gesture to send a message to the delegates.¹⁰⁴

The other government which took it for granted that criticism towards Cuba in Belgrade depended on US activism was, perhaps not surprisingly, the Cuban government itself. In a final press conference in Belgrade, Malmierca declared that some fifteen delegations 'spoke with a marked Yankee accent'.¹⁰⁵ More importantly, on 26 July, on the second day of the conference, during a speech in Santiago de Cuba celebrating the 25th anniversary of the start of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro had frontally attacked Jimmy Carter for the first time,

¹⁰⁰Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1978: 1. Juli bis 31. Dezember (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2011), doc. 238, Memorandum of conversation between Vrhovec and Hans-Dietrich Genscher, 11 August 1978.

¹⁰¹USBEL to State, 'Belgrade Non-Aligned Conference', 30 July 1978; USBEL to State, 'The Belgrade Nonaligned Foreign Ministers Conference', 8 August 1978; French Ambassador in Cuba to MFA, 'Cuba et la conférence ministérielle des pays non alignés', 2 August 1978, AMAE, SE, 1976-1980, 4836, You-11-1.

¹⁰²Statement by his Excellency Josip Broz Tito', 25 July 1978, attached (Annex IV) to Letter from the Yugoslav Chargé d'affaires to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, 6 September 1978, UNDL, A_33_206-EN.

¹⁰³The Belgrade final communiqué is attached to Letter from the Yugoslav Chargé d'affaires to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, 6 September 1978, UNDL, A_33_206-EN.

¹⁰⁴USBEL to State, 'Yugoslav Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs Loncar Assesses Belgrade NAM Conference', 4 August 1978, ADD. According to French sources, US diplomats 'felt the blow': French Chargé in Belgrade to MFA, 'Conférence ministérielle des pays non alignés', 1 August 1978, AMAE, SE, 1976-1980, 4836, You-11-1.

¹⁰⁵Desenmascara Malmierca a los que han violado los principios de los No Alineados y lanzado calumnias contra Cuba', *Granma*, 30 July 1978.

inviting him to be true to his pleas for ‘human rights’ by giving an amnesty to the ‘thousands of black north-Americans who were forced to commit crimes as a consequence of discrimination, unemployment and hunger’.¹⁰⁶ While the speech is usually considered a tipping point for the deterioration in US-Cuban relations in the Carter years, few observers have noted that the US government’s meddling with the NAM was one of its main themes – indeed the one from which Castro began his final tirade against the US government, which he himself now accused of ‘trying to sabotage’ the forthcoming Havana Summit. Of course, he also assured his audience that the Cuban government would not ‘make any concessions’ and would never ‘bow down to imperialist demands and blackmail’.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

In the wake of the Belgrade meeting, the Carter administration accepted that it would soon be confronted with a NAM summit in Havana and with three years of Cuban NAM presidency, which – it assumed – Cuba would exploit, among other things, to ‘provide greater approval for Cuba’s interventionist politics [*sic*] in Africa’.¹⁰⁸ If anything, this equated to recognizing that the administration’s plan had failed.

To be sure, some echoes of the plan persisted in Carter’s later foreign policy: encouraging the NAM to discuss Cuban military activities ‘in ways that may inhibit [their] acceptability’ would still feature among US objectives in preparation for the Havana Summit, as these were defined in the spring of 1979, after a lengthy internal debate initiated right after Belgrade.¹⁰⁹ Yet, greater emphasis now fell on ‘encouraging moderate leadership in the NAM’, seeking ‘NAM adherence to universal principles’, and demonstrating US ‘willingness to take the Third World seriously’ on the eve of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), which was to be held in Manila in June of the same year.¹¹⁰ In short, by 1979 the administration did develop an interest in the NAM *per se*, even though one which was still largely about contesting Cuba’s ‘radical’ positions and which perhaps had something of a mission creep.¹¹¹ As far as Cuba itself was concerned, bilateral relations did not recover from the mutual rhetorical blows of mid-1978: even though the two sides kept a confidential backchannel open, they both leveled increasingly bitter accusations at each other in the following months, as Washington also radicalized its ‘Cold War’ rhetoric

¹⁰⁶Fidel Castro, ‘Discurso’, 26 July 1978, www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1978/esp/f260778e.html.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.* The emphasis on US meddling with the NAM was indeed noticed by US diplomats in Havana. As the US *chargé* in Havana also reported with some frustration, ‘most Latin American Chiefs of mission [...], with the notable exception of the Venezuelan and the Argentine, were on their feet applauding enthusiastically with the crowd much of the time’: USINT to State, ‘Additional Observations on Castro’s 26 July Speech’, 31 July 1978, AAD.

¹⁰⁸Christopher to All American Republic Diplomatic Posts, ‘ARA Weekly Highlights’, 9 September 1978, AAD.

¹⁰⁹Option for a Strategy of Active Diplomacy toward the Non Aligned Movement, attached to Peter Tarnoff to Brzezinski, 10 March 1979, JCL, NSA, NLC-24-114-3-5-1.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*; and ‘Interagency Review of US Policy toward the Non-Aligned Movement’, attached to Tarnoff to Brzezinski, 10 March 1979, JCL, NSA, NLC-24-114-3-5-1.

¹¹¹By late April, the State Department prepared a detailed schedule of actions and diplomatic demarches to be undertaken both before, during and after the Havana Summit, the main goal of which was to ‘stimulate the maximum amount of coordination among the moderates going to Havana and to impart a clear understanding of US positions on issues likely to arise at the Summit’: Charles Maynes to Under Secretary of State David Newsom, ‘US Policy toward the Non-Aligned Movement: Action Plan’, 20 April 1979, JCL, NLC-24-58-5-8-8. Perhaps sensing the involuntary comic effect of the proviso that all of this was to be achieved ‘while making clear that [the US did] not wish to interfere with the NAM’ (as requested by the approved strategy), Under Secretary David Newsom tactfully suggested at least checking with the Yugoslavs whether such a massive lobbying campaign might cause them any problems: Newsom to Maynes, ‘US Policy toward the Non-Aligned Movement’, 21 April 1979, JCL, NLC-24-58-5-8-8. In a more informal context, CIA Director Stansfield Turner must have felt less constrained when, with Brzezinski’s enthusiastic approval, he noted that the NAM

over events and ‘crises’ in disparate countries and regions as Iran, Afghanistan, Central America, and South-East Asia.¹¹² Thus, the relatively open confrontational attitude that the administration adopted in 1979 vis-à-vis Cuba’s prospective NAM presidency built on the legacy of its original plan to make instrumental use of the NAM, but took shape in a quite different context and was based on largely different rationales. These considerations suggest that it is appropriate to conclude with the Belgrade conference the analysis of the US’s attempt to make use of the NAM to drive Cuba out of Africa.

The following concluding remarks issue from the story above. First, the unearthing of the story *per se* adds a new element to our knowledge of the Carter administration’s reaction to Cuba’s activism in Africa, in the form of a policy aimed at bringing about Cuba’s withdrawal which was pursued over several months, in addition to the better-known rhetorical attacks on Havana and ‘punishments’ of its conduct. The policy’s assumptions may have been naïve and its implementation less than deft. Of course, the plan’s objective may have been also questionable on many grounds. Yet it was coherent in its own terms. Further, in terms of the functioning of the administration’s foreign policy machinery, the project bridged the differences between the NSC and the State Department at a time when ‘Cuba in Africa’ divided them quite radically: the basic inputs for the policy came from the NSC, but the State Department played along.

Second, the story above enables a more refined understanding of US-Cuban bilateral relations in the Carter years. While in most available accounts US demands that Cuba withdraw its troops from Africa appear as a passive obstacle on the road to bilateral normalization, the intensity of US efforts with the NAM and the heated reactions that they provoked in Cuba engendered a dynamic of their own. US efforts did not simply prevent normalization but also ran against it. In turn, this only strengthens Piero Gleijeses’s observation that, even if losing normalization with Cuba may have come at little cost to Carter, his actions and words also dealt severe blows to US-Soviet *détente*, ostensibly a much more important priority for the US President.¹¹³ Finally, as far as the NAM was concerned, the story above indicates that Jimmy Carter was readier than most of his predecessors to engage the Non-Aligned Movement, his well-wishing message to the Belgrade conference being a first for a US President. However, the same story also leads to the conclusion that at least up to mid-1978 Carter’s engagement with the NAM was essentially instrumental and came with an implicit logic of *divide et impera*. While more research is needed to gauge the reception of Carter’s approaches by relevant non-aligned governments, neither feature appears to have been particularly auspicious for the success of the US plan, and early evidence suggests that both likely contributed to its substantial failure.¹¹⁴

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was growing both ‘in importance and vulnerability’ and that the administration ‘should do all [it could] to sabotage’ the upcoming Summit: *FRUS, Vol. XIX, doc. 11, Minutes of a Policy Review Committee Meeting, 22 February 1979.*

¹¹²LeoGrande, Kornbluh, *Back Channel*, 205-207; Donaghy, *The Second Cold War*, chap. 2.

¹¹³Gleijeses, *Visions*, 50, 59-60.

¹¹⁴The author wishes to thank Vanni Pettinà and Massimiliano Trentin for their early feedback, and two anonymous *Cold War History* reviewers for their helpful comments. Special thanks to Benedetto Zaccaria who, besides providing me with incisive comments on an early draft of this article, also allowed me to consult his copies of French and Yugoslav diplomatic documents.