

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 129

READER'S DIGEST
September 1982

What's Happened to U.S. Foreign Policy?

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AT THE BEGINNING of his Presidency, Ronald Reagan promised he would restore lagging U.S. military strength, resist Soviet expansionism and end depredations in Latin America by Fidel Castro's Cuba. He described President Jimmy Carter's foreign policy as "weak, vacillating, amateurish, indecisive and confused." A revival of American activism abroad seemed certain.

But by early this summer it was painfully clear that Reagan's own foreign policy had stumbled badly, buffeted by one world crisis after another. The sudden resignation of Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig, Jr., in late June represented a belated attempt by the President to regain control of his foreign policy. Haig's insistence that he alone was the "vicar" of American foreign policy had not only exhausted Reagan's patience but had led to a catalogue of confusions and reverses that the new Secretary of State, George P. Shultz, must now address:

The Soviet Union. Backed by conservatives in both the Republican and Democratic parties, Reagan had long argued that American dealings with the Soviet Union in such areas as grain sales, technology exchange and strategic-arms control must be "linked" to Soviet good conduct in other areas. The logic of linkage: if the Russians betrayed our trust in one sphere, they should not be trusted in another. But when the Soviets continued to prosecute their war against Afghanistan and engineered a mar-

tial-law crackdown in Poland, tough talk from the President far outran the Administration's performance in generating economic and financial reprisals. Although Reagan could have declared these Soviet actions a roadblock to much-needed disarmament talks, he instead called for "early" arms negotiations without a quid pro quo from the Kremlin. The concept of linkage had disappeared without a trace.

Latin America. Haig's warlike rhetoric created expectations of tough U.S. actions to stop Cuba's export of revolution. But when conservative Senators protested the basing of MiG fighter-bombers in Cuba, the White House, backed by the Pentagon, chose caution. In dealing with the increasingly repressive Marxist regime in Nicaragua, the Administration did little to encourage Nicaraguan resistance groups. The White House's lack of strategy to meet the threat of a Cuban-armed Nicaragua disillusioned many Latin Americans.

The Middle East. The Reagan Administration made three major blunders in this strategically crucial area. After first seeming to accommodate Israel, it then reversed itself so drastically that it alienated Prime Minister Menachem Begin's government. It then irritated our closest Arab friends by not pressing Israel to fulfill the commitments made at Camp David to negotiate self government for Arabs in the lands captured west of the Jordan

River in the 1967 war. And by failing to take a strong position on Iraq's war with Ayatollah Khomeini's Soviet-backed Iran, the Administration exposed the oil-rich Persian Gulf states to the threat of religious wars and Soviet penetration. When Israel's military invasion of Lebanon shattered Palestine Liberation Organization forces in June, the Administration's hesitation, then acquiescence, made the United States appear impotent to the world—and especially to the Arab nations.

WHAT HAPPENED? Almost certainly, there has been no change in Ronald Reagan's world view. But as a novice in international affairs, the new President delegated the substance of foreign policy to men who did not share his basic instincts enough to translate them into action. Chief among these was the pragmatic Haig, who had the freest hand of any recent Secretary of State. Without interference from the White House, he staffed his department with Foreign Service officers, holdovers from previous Administrations and outsiders without visible ideological connection to Ronald Reagan. Policy-making power remained in the hands of temporizing, business-as-usual State Department professionals.

National Security Council (NSC) meetings were the scene of slugfests between the deep-toned and aggressive Haig and the soft-voiced, lawyerly Defense Secretary Caspar

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Weinberger. The styles of the two men belied their substance. For all his stentorian passion, Haig came down on the side of a foreign policy that was almost indistinguishable from that of the previous Administration, except in the human-rights area. More ideologically in tune with the President, Weinberger favors a tougher stance against the Soviets. Two NSC meetings provide crucial examples of the ideological conflict that split Reagan's advisers.

On May 3, 1982, the President held an NSC meeting to decide what sort of arms-control program the United States should submit to the Russians. One question the President had to decide was: How could the United States assure Soviet compliance with new restrictions?

Weinberger argued for on-site inspection to guard against Soviet cheating. The technological limits of satellite photography and electronic data collection would not permit adequate verification of Soviet compliance, he said.

When Weinberger finished, Haig struck hard, saying the President must know that the Russians would never accept on-site inspection. To demand it, he continued, would doom any arms-reduction proposal the President made. This, in turn, would diminish the President's standing as a world leader and inhibit his effort to reduce the danger of nuclear war.

Reagan ended the meeting without reaching a decision. Only later did he, in effect, side with Haig. The United States would move immediately toward arms talks, postponing the vital question of on-site inspection to some later day.

Last December, when the NSC met after the martial-law clamp-down in Poland, Haig, the Europeanist, had also counseled caution: Don't interrupt the U.S.-Soviet-European nuclear-arms talks just begun in Geneva. Don't declare the Poles in default of their almost \$30-billion debt to the West. Don't

pressure our Western allies to get out of billion-dollar contracts to finance Moscow's trans-Siberian gas pipeline to seven European countries, including five NATO members.

Weinberger and CIA Director William Casey strongly opposed Haig, arguing that playing to the alliance would let the Soviets off the hook. Reagan's own instinct was to go all the way in punishing the Russians. But in the end, Haig played his ace, dealt ironically out of Reagan's own hand: In early 1981 the President had fulfilled a purely political campaign pledge to end the anti-Soviet grain embargo imposed by President Carter. That left the United States without the means to pressure the NATO allies into anti-Soviet sanctions that might hurt their own economies. The United States did nothing to punish the Soviets for their Polish putsch.

Many of Reagan's foreign-policy problems have stemmed from another ill-considered campaign pledge. He promised not to allow his NSC staff director to gain the kind of power Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski had in the Nixon and Carter administrations. By enforcing that pledge, Reagan denied his NSC staff its most vital functions: harmonizing differences between the Departments of State and Defense, and acting as the President's eyes and ears in his final policy choices.

Reagan's pledge to downgrade his NSC staff deprived his first NSC director, hard-liner Richard V. Allen, of prestige and influence. Haig moved at once to exploit Allen's weakness and to claim for himself the role of foreign-policy vicar.

Throughout 1981, policy-making bordered on the chaotic. Combat between Haig and Allen, compounded by an even deeper hostility between Haig and James Baker, the White House Chief of Staff, cost Reagan what he most needed: credibility abroad as the leader of the West.

Although dissension between a Secretary of State and the White House staff is routine in Washington, the extent of *these* feuds was unprecedented. Moreover, their corrosive effect on the President's foreign policy was heightened by the fact that Ronald Reagan is perhaps the greatest delegator of power among recent Presidents. This, combined with his lack of experience in national security, has been at the root of much that went wrong with our foreign policy.

Haig was given the burden of the blame for a becalmed Mideast policy that relegated the United States to the sidelines while Israel took command with its offensive into Lebanon. Less than a month after the Secretary of State announced "a more active role" for the United States in promoting a negotiated settlement between Israel and the Arabs, the Israeli armed services destroyed PLO pockets in Lebanon and achieved their own kind of settlement—with American-supplied tanks and warplanes. Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev protested to Reagan, and the United States demanded Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon. "We were telling the world that we reacted only under threat from Moscow," grumbled a high-ranking Pentagon official. Begin ignored Reagan's demands, and the United States eventually vetoed a U.N. resolution requiring Israeli withdrawal.

Because of its passivity, the Reagan Administration thus wound up with its prestige low throughout the Arab world, its ability to influence and moderate Israel obviously impaired, and Soviet opportunists ready and eager to re-enter the Mideast through any door left open by the United States.

By no means has everything Reagan tried in his foreign policy failed or disappointed his ideological allies. He ended the Carter Administration's debilitating "human rights" policy and encouraged relations with friendly—if flawed—regimes. He has followed a fairly

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consistent policy of rebuilding relationships with strategically vital Turkey and Pakistan. Until the Falkland Islands war, he had renewed important economic, diplomatic and military contacts with Argentina, Brazil, Chile and other non-democratic Latin American states essential to hemispheric security. He strengthened the resources behind the Rapid Deployment Force for the Persian Gulf. Most important, Reagan followed through on rebuilding America's defenses.

But these moves, as significant as they are, did not appear as part of a coherent foreign policy—one in which a strengthened America would successfully contest the Soviet attempt to dominate world affairs. And it was to this conclusion that Reagan himself came during the Versailles economic summit last June. Credit for this awakening must go, in part, to William P. Clark, a long-time close

associate whom Reagan named National Security Adviser earlier this year.

Clark would not tolerate Haig's insistence on overriding everybody—even the President—on foreign-policy questions. At a National Security Council meeting on June 18, which Clark set up, Reagan gave orders to tighten the screws against the Siberian gas pipeline by denying export licenses to foreign companies providing equipment for the project. Seeing that he would never again be the undisputed vicar, Haig submitted his resignation and the White House accepted it without hesitation.

With George Shultz as his new Secretary of State, Reagan now has the opportunity to re-establish a true American counterpoise to Soviet power. If he does, he will revive the hopes of those who believe that only America's strength and will can preserve freedom throughout the world.