

## Foreign policy progress and an array of traps

by Richard Cohen

Close observers of Reagan administration foreign policy believe that the President's upcoming meetings with West German Chancellor Schmidt May 20 and Mexican President López Portillo June 8 and 9 may be the turning point in establishing U.S. foreign policy for the next three and a half years.

The importance of these meetings intensified last week as the Reagan administration came under two dramatic foreign policy time limits: the possible defeat of French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, which could collapse positive European initiatives worldwide, and an Israeli time limit on a surgical move into south Lebanon to eliminate Syrian-installed SAM missiles, which could seriously polarize the Middle East.

Sources in the White House and other departments have indicated that the President has personally elevated the López Portillo visit to a status above other foreign policy considerations. Further dramatizing the importance of the Schmidt and López Portillo meetings, other Reagan administration moves which surfaced last week in Central America, Africa, and Asia show the administration is falling into potentially disastrous traps. These activities have been encouraged by Secretary of State Alexander Haig and Second International "holdovers" from the Carter administration.

While press headlines this week touted a Haig "policy victory" in obtaining presidential agreement to enter into negotiations with the Soviet Union on weapons reduction, informed sources noted that he was merely stating what had already been announced by presidential counselor Edwin Meese III last week on national televi-

sion. Meese indicated that Reagan would be prepared to enter into negotiations with the Soviets on arms reduction and other matters at the earliest possible time. The Meese announcement, however, indicated that such talks could only take place if the Soviet Union were not to invade or threaten Poland, and would gain momentum only if the Soviets were to withdraw from Afghanistan.

These were the same conditions Haig repeated to the NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Rome on May 4-6. In fact, sources close to the White House report that Haig is on a short leash, reading a script on his European visit. Before Haig left, Reagan had also sent a letter to Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev, the contents of which are yet to be revealed. The letter was a response to a letter sent by Brezhnev to all heads of state of NATO countries and Haig announced its delivery during the NATO meeting.

Other NATO members, most prominently the Schmidt government through Foreign Minister Genscher, exerted verbal pressure on Reagan to respond positively. The importance of the Reagan move lies in the opening of a dialogue between Presidents Reagan and Brezhnev—encouraged by European pressure.

Such positive moves by the administration, however, were overshadowed by the deepening crisis in Lebanon. Sources close to the administration report a desperate level of diplomatic activity, starting with the recent meeting of Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin and State Undersecretary Stoessel, followed by a National Security Council meeting, and ending in a series of meetings involving Reagan, Haig, and U.N. Secretary-General Kurt Wald-

heim. Administration concern has led to reports of "strong diplomatic efforts" to restrain Israel from deep moves into Lebanon to knock out Syrian missiles. Prime Minister Begin sent out signals that remarks made last month by Haig and earlier by National Security Adviser Richard Allen provided justification for an imminent Israeli move against the new Syrian capability, thus complicating matters, and causing great consternation in the White House.

Under these conditions, the State Department was forced on May 1 to warn Israel against misreading the Haig and Allen statements. The department simultaneously announced an investigation into whether U.S. weapons were used in Israel's downing of two Syrian helicopters earlier in the week. However, the warnings to the Israelis and the diplomatic moves vis-à-vis the Syrians and Soviets bore no immediately visible fruit as the increased desperation led to the deployment of retired (Kissinger and Vance) State Department official Philip Habib to the Mideast, whose presumed credentials for this time-buying mission are his acceptability to all parties.

But this series of activities, according to analysts, only indicated the administration's particular weakness in the Mideast at this point. It is now clear that any escalation of the crisis would benefit the Begin regime, up soon for re-election, Syria's Assad, and the Soviets—to the detriment of the Reagan administration. It is now believed that only last-minute efforts aimed at bringing Soviet pressure to bear on the Syrians, and U.S. pressure to bear on the Israeli commitments to Lebanese Christian forces, could resolve the crisis.

### **Trap in Namibia and Angola**

With respect to Reagan's policies for the rest of Africa, two crucial factors can contribute to extricating the administration from blunders which could encourage black Africa to look more to the Soviets. One factor is the meetings the President will have with Schmidt and with López Portillo. The other is the clear policy ascendancy of close Reagan political advisers over cabinet officials such as Haig.

If these factors do not combine to shift policy, then we are likely to see disasters like the one made last week at the NATO foreign ministers meeting, where Haig promoted a shift toward South Africa to accommodate the "fears" of Prime Minister P. W. Botha on the Namibia question by giving South Africa a voice in the Namibian constitution prior to elections. This—combined with the invitation to Botha to visit the United States—has not only led to potentially serious deterioration of U.S. relations with black African countries, but also is attached to a policy which was announced by administration officials last week to promote a "united government" in Angola, bringing in rebel leader Jonas

Savimbi, that would further worsen U.S. relations with the continent.

### **Guatemala-Honduras situation**

Back in the Western Hemisphere, reliable sources in Washington reported last week that Socialist International-inspired and Cuban-supported guerrilla efforts in Guatemala have escalated drastically over the past month. Intelligence reports streaming into the administration indicate that the logistical possibilities provided guerrillas in El Salvador were now present in Guatemala. Acting Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs Bushnell (of the Carter administration) announced at hearings this past week that the United States is now considering military aid to the dubious right-wing Jesuit regime in Guatemala, that could only lead to civil war. Front-page *Washington Post* stories this week proclaiming that Honduras has planned to invade Nicaragua emanated from William Bowdler, a former prominent State Department official tied into an entire Socialist International press network at the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. The activation of these stories now, according to sources, was aimed at "heating up" the situation.

Likewise, the potential of the Reagan-López Portillo meeting for addressing the Central American problem from a different standpoint was made evident by Vice-President Bush after a meeting with his Mexican counterpart. The United States would consult with Mexico on all policies regarding Central America, Bush announced.

### **Far East troubles**

Finally, Reagan's Asian policies seem destined to undo any of the positive moves being made with the Giscard-Schmidt prodétente axis in Europe. Recently revealed U.S. moves in Kampuchea to secure a united front between Son Sann's 3,000-man forces and the 35,000-man genocidal Pol Pot forces will result in giving U.S. support to Peking's political control over the movement that is trying to oust the Kampuchean government (see article, page 48).

State Department officials this week in Washington attempted to intimidate a reticent Son Sann to enter into agreement with the Chinese-dominated Khmer Rouge forces in order to forge a front against the Vietnamese-supported Cambodian government and put pressure on the Soviets. This policy is being sold to the White House on the basis of anti-Sovietism and an absurd proposition that the United States could ultimately control such a united front instead of Peking. At present, the White House is aware of this operation and has refused public comment. But the mere fact that such a policy is being entertained is sufficient to suggest the real vulnerabilities of the Reagan administration.