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**Tom Long. "Putting the Canal on the Map: Panamanian Agenda-Setting and the 1973 Security Council Meetings." *Diplomatic History* 38:2 (April 2014): 431-455. DOI: 10.1093/dh/dht096. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/dh/dht096>**

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It is not often that a journal article arrives in a scholar's mail on a Monday, is read on Tuesday, and has its findings incorporated into a lecture on Wednesday. But it says something about my admiration for what Tom Long has accomplished here that this was the case in my spring course on the history of inter-American relations.

Long demonstrates convincingly that the government of General Omar Torrijos, an ideologically ambiguous populist dictator, was able to use the United Nations Security Council to help get stalled bilateral talks over the future of the Panama Canal moving again. Following the riots over the issue of the flying of the Panamanian flag in the Canal Zone in 1964, the Lyndon Baines Johnson administration had promised to move toward a gradual fulfillment of Panamanian aspirations to sovereignty over the Canal Zone and the Canal itself. A treaty signed in 1967, however, had never been submitted to either country's legislature for ratification. President Richard M. Nixon, for his part, had no intention of moving in the direction that the Torrijos government desired. (A rather odd part of the story here is that Nixon disliked Robert Anderson, President Dwight David Eisenhower's Secretary of the Treasury and the Ambassador charged with negotiating with the Panamanians. Neither Nixon nor National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger ever met with Anderson before, during, or after the negotiations.)

Torrijos and his dynamic and often young risk-taking foreign ministers and ambassadors sought to gain support for their position internationally by placing the Canal issue in the context of justice, decolonization, and self-determination. The 1970s was a decade in which many Third-World countries were seeking ways to address common interests. Although this was certainly evident in the deliberations of the General Assembly, the Security Council was generally seen as the place where Third-World aspirations went to

die during the Cold War. The Panamanian government, however, sought to internationalize the canal issue by seeking allies not only in Latin America but also in the Middle East and Africa. They began by convincing the Security Council to follow the recently established precedent of meeting outside of New York (the first time was in Addis Ababa in 1972) and to meet in Panama itself. Although the United States foresaw the danger of allowing this to happen, it was isolated on the Council and agreed to vote in favor of meeting there.

At the March 1973 meeting, Torrijos went on the offensive and in the welcoming ceremony spoke of the “humiliation of colonialism.” It is “nobler to amend an injustice than to perpetuate an error,” he asserted (443). Panama and Peru then introduced a resolution which would have abrogated the 1903 treaty and affirmed Panamanian sovereignty over the Canal Zone. The United States argued that the Canal was an issue between the United States and Panama and that the Council had no say in the matter. Panama, however, received the support of most Council members. Thirteen countries ended up voting in favor of the resolution. Great Britain abstained. The United States vetoed a Security Council resolution for only the third time, but, in the global context of 1973, the employment of the veto was perceived as a defeat for the United States.

Henry Kissinger then became engaged with the subject for the first time. He was concerned about the larger implications for relations with Latin America. And he encouraged Nixon to begin to speak about a “fresh look” at the Canal in May (448). Panama then sought the removal of Ambassador Anderson. And new negotiations began with Ellsworth Bunker, who was given more freedom to consider a wider variety of options. Kissinger hoped that this would prevent the Panamanians from taking the issue before the UN General Assembly. By October 1973, Kissinger called for a “new dialogue” with Latin America (451). By early 1974, a new statement of principles was agreed to, which was the basis for the treaty which was eventually signed by Torrijos and President Jimmy Carter. (For domestic reasons and hopeful of being elected to a term of his own, President Gerald Ford did not move forward on the issue. I would suggest that Carter deserves more credit for taking a political risk than Long seems willing to give him.<sup>1</sup>)

As I suggested at the beginning of this review, I find much of what Long says compelling and convincing. But I do have some questions, some of which relate to the idea of agenda-setting itself. What made it possible for Panama to set the agenda in an institution designed to frustrate less powerful countries? Was it primarily due to the talent and persistence of Torrijos and his allies? (One might wonder, for example, why

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<sup>1</sup> Kissinger sounds frustrated with the unwillingness to “take on Panama right now” in a Memorandum of Conversation, 6 July 1975, in William Burr (ed.), *The Kissinger Transcripts* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 378. Regarding the Panama Canal treaty, see Adam Clymer, *Drawing the Line at the Big Ditch: The Panama Canal Treaties and the Rise of the Right* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008); and Natalia Zaretsky, “Restraint or Retreat? The Debate over the Panama Canal Treaties and US Nationalism after Vietnam,” *Diplomatic History* 35:3 (June 2011): 535-562.

Cuban President Fidel Castro never was able to set the agenda on Guantánamo.) Did it matter most that Torrijos and his aides knew how to speak the language of the Third World? Didn't most countries at this time speak in much the same way in international forums? Was it, in large part, due to the greater assertiveness of the Third World itself during this time period? Or was it simply that the Panama Canal had long been an anomaly in a post-colonial world? (It might be noted that Long does not really address how the United States had guaranteed at the time of the United Nations' founding that the UN would not have a say in Western Hemisphere affairs.<sup>2</sup>)

For that matter, why did the veto matter so much? Why did it demonstrate the isolation of the United States in the world? Was it primarily due to the perceived weakness of the United States at this time? The United States was about to remove the last of its troops from Vietnam. Did much of the world now view the United States as toothless? A decade later the United States vetoed a UN Security Council resolution condemning the invasion of Grenada, but this had no impact on U.S. policy.

There is also the question of timing, as it relates to the changing interests of Henry Kissinger. It is often safe to ignore announcements of second-term plans for changes in U.S. foreign policies, with the obvious exception of President Ronald Reagan. Many presidents know that there is too little time to be held accountable for proposals when one's political capital is already spent and one is unlikely to be able to carry through with plans. It is even easier to ignore second-term dynamics in Nixon's case because of the growing weakness of the President's position as a result of the Watergate scandal. A triangular diplomat with a bi-polar mind, could Kissinger see the Third World on its own terms, and would he be willing as both National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, as of late September, to take risks himself to gain influence in the Third World?<sup>3</sup> As global dynamics became more complex and unpredictable, was he more willing to take Third World countries seriously as political players? Was he being influenced by his new friends in China?<sup>4</sup> Or was he responding specifically to events in Latin America? Consider the timing of the proposed "new dialogue," only weeks following the toppling of the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende in Chile, the one major threat to U.S. foreign policy in the region during the Nixon/Kissinger years (451).

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<sup>2</sup> See the discussion in Gaddis Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine, 1945-1993* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 40-60.

<sup>3</sup> One thinks of Kissinger's attempt to build a strong working relationship with Brazil. See Matias Spektor, *Kissinger e o Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2009). See also Jeremi Suri's discussion of his admiration for Egypt's Anwar Sadat in *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 261-265. One should not overstate his new Third-World orientation, however. The best overall treatment remains Jussi Hanhimäki's *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Regarding Kissinger and China, see, for example, see Burr (ed.), *The Kissinger Transcripts*, 167-168.

In any case, one assumes that Long is interested primarily in historical contingency and not in contributing to a general theory of agenda-setting. The period between 1973 and 1976, although relatively neglected so far by historians, seems to me to have been an unusually rich one in the development of U.S. foreign relations. Undoubtedly, there was a greater sense of U.S. vulnerability, due at least as much to the impact of oil price shocks as to Vietnam. Congress was asserting itself, most notably in the area of human rights, but also by blocking Ford administration efforts to intervene in Angola (both of which, of course, Kissinger opposed strongly). And, of course, the continuing relaxation of tensions with the Soviet Union had some uneasy moments and even the move to improvement of relations with Communist China was hitting a few roadblocks.

What the long-term results for the Third World would be remained to be seen. But, at least, in the long run, Panama would get its canal.

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