

**Walter Kansteiner,  
Assistant Secretary of State for Africa**

By Ann-Louise Colgan

Walter Kansteiner, Bush's nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, was chosen for the post over well-respected foreign service professional Johnny Carson, who currently serves as U.S. ambassador to Kenya. Initial reports on Kansteiner have noted his background as a commodities trader and as an African affairs expert at the State Department and National Security Council during the first Bush administration. In 1991 Kansteiner received the State Department's Distinguished Honor Award for work promoting privatization. During the Clinton years, he worked for the Scowcroft Group, a consulting firm headed by Brent Scowcroft, former national security adviser and Kansteiner's former boss in the Bush administration. Kansteiner has written occasional articles on Africa for The Forum for International Policy (<http://www.ffip.org/>), a center-right Washington think tank where Scowcroft is a resident trustee.

Kansteiner has also strong family ties to the Republican Party. His wife belongs to the prominent Blount family, whose members are major contributors to the Republican Party and owners of Blount International, a large construction and manufacturing firm headquartered in Montgomery, Alabama.

Kansteiner fits the profile of the majority of the middle-tiered appointees of the Bush administration, described in *The Washington Post* (March 25, 2001) as having "eclipsed Reagan's in conservatism." Although some portray the State Department as a haven of moderates in contrast to Pentagon and White House hardliners, Kansteiner's appointment mirrors the appointments of Otto Reich for Latin American affairs at the State Department and of John Negroponte for the position of UN representative. With Kansteiner, Bush is appointing

another right-wing ideologue to a key operational position dealing with regional issues. Interestingly, neither Kansteiner's official biography nor news stories to date highlight his ties with the far-right Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD).

The IRD (<http://www.ird-renew.org/>) was established in 1981 to counter the influence of mainline Christian organizations such as the National Council of Churches (NCC) and its international counterpart the World Council of Churches (WCC). It established special caucuses for attacking three of the largest national Protestant denominations: the Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Methodist churches. The Institute claims to be a centrist organization, committed to building and strengthening democracy and religious liberty in the U.S. and abroad. Its history, however, displays virulent opposition to social justice movements in the developing world. It has been especially critical of U.S. religious groups supporting liberation theology in Latin America and liberation movements in Africa.

In the late 1980s, Kansteiner was appointed Director of Economic Studies at the IRD. This extreme right think-tank sponsored his early research on South Africa and published his 1988 book on South Africa entitled *Revolution or Reconciliation?*

Kansteiner's book, published just two years before Nelson Mandela's release from prison, systematically attacks the African National Congress (ANC). Throughout the book, Kansteiner characterizes the ANC as a group of violent revolutionaries engaged in an "unjustified" and "Marxist" struggle against the government, without a mandate from the South African people. While criticizing the apartheid



government, he repeatedly refers to the ANC as an “equally foreboding” option for leadership. He describes the ANC movement as illegitimate and undeserving of assistance, while urging each American to “resist the temptation to become (...) a romantic revolutionary supportive of violent revolutionary tactics.” Only a few years before the ANC’s victory in South Africa’s first democratic elections, Kansteiner denounced it as “unrepresentative.” There is no public record of his retracting that opinion in deference to the judgment of South African voters who gave the ANC nearly two-thirds of the public vote in the 1994 election (effectively ending political apartheid) and more than two-thirds in the 1999 elections following Mandela’s retirement at the end of his term.

Even after the U.S. Congress, driven by public pressure, overrode the Reagan administration and imposed economic sanctions against the apartheid regime in 1986, Kansteiner (like Dick Cheney, another member

of the previous Bush administration) maintained his opposition to sanctions. His book is highly critical of the role of the U.S. mainline churches for their support of sanctions, divestiture, and consumer boycotts in the 1980s. Such measures, he said, would further polarize South African society. Instead, he advocated a U.S. policy of constructive engagement with the apartheid regime and internal negotiations between the black majority and the white government.

Before his government service in the 1990s, Kansteiner was a commodities trader and an adviser on emerging-market business issues in Africa. These commercial concerns and his focus on privatizing public sector industries in Africa signal his approach to economic development in Africa. This narrow, business-oriented perspective on Africa is shared by many in Bush’s foreign policy team.

There is no indication that Kansteiner has much understanding

of or concern for difficult African issues and even less for the global issues (such as debt relief and access to essential AIDS medicines) that affect Africa. In his issue briefs for The Forum for International Policy, he did shed his hard-line ideology in favor of bland advocacy of market promotion, joining the pitch for Africa as a new emerging market. But those who seek enlightened leadership, professional diplomatic experience, and openness to dialogue with African civil society and pro-democracy forces are unlikely to find such qualities in a State Department Africa Bureau under his guidance. The nomination of someone as unsuitable as Kansteiner deserves greater scrutiny and public opposition.

*Ann-Louise Colgan*

*<ann@africapolicy.org> Research Associate, Africa Action—incorporating American Committee on Africa (ACOA), The Africa Fund, Africa Policy Information Center (APIC).*

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