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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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May 11, 1977

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MEMORANDUM FOR DR. ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI
THE WHITE HOUSE

Subject: Human Rights Policy Impact: Latin America

The Carter Administration's human rights policy is having a significant impact in Latin America. A good many Latin American governments have reacted negatively, but some of these have nonetheless taken steps to improve their performance. There have been numerous indications of approval in important sectors of Latin American public opinion. Of course these generalizations should be treated with caution.

The United States Government's new higher priority for human rights, as reflected in Administration speeches and statements, diplomatic representations, military aid cuts, actions taken on IFI loans, and Congressional hearings, has caused the governments of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Guatemala, and El Salvador to reject, in whole or in part, security assistance predicated on human rights considerations (actually the Brazilian Government attributed its reaction to the issuance of our Brazil Human Rights Report, a decision made prior to the Carter Administration). Leaders in these and other governments have expressed resentment and concern, as well as some bewilderment, at the United States Government's human rights stand. Many in Latin American ruling circles regard our actions and words as intervention in their domestic affairs and a self-defeating abandonment of old allies who are fighting a common enemy, international Communism. This reaction has been reflected in pro-government press comment, at least some of which has been directly inspired by local regimes.

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On the other hand, some officials of these governments have privately expressed approval of the Carter human rights policy. And a significant minority of Latin American governments, including those of Venezuela, Costa Rica, and Colombia, have openly voiced their support.

Impact on the actual human rights performance of Latin American governments has also been mixed, with a few regimes taking more progressive and repressive measures at the same time. In some cases our human rights campaign seems to have strengthened the hand of hardliners (e.g., in Brazil, Uruguay and probably in Argentina), at least temporarily. The Geisel Government has used alleged Yankee intervention in Brazil's domestic affairs, specifically the Government of Brazil's nuclear energy and human rights performance, to rally domestic support for its policies. Geisel has subsequently weakened the legal opposition MDB through amendment of the Constitution by Executive Decree. However, there is no question but that a good many Latin American governments have become increasingly concerned about their human rights image. Some undoubtedly have been influenced, consciously and/or unconsciously, to release prisoners (e.g., Chile, Paraguay and Haiti), to caution security officers against excesses (e.g., Brazil and Nicaragua), to refrain from repressive actions which otherwise might have been taken, etc. Some of these positive results were already underway even before the Carter Administration, partly as a result of Congressional stimulus. The net incremental changes are difficult to identify and impossible to quantify. No government is likely to admit that it is pursuing a more civilized and humane policy towards its own citizens because of outside advice or pressure. But there are indications that some governments hope for public or tangible recognition of positive steps taken. These might well be encouraged in the direction of still further progress.

It is much more difficult to calculate the reaction of Latin American public opinion. Unquestionably much of it has been positive, although often muted in fear

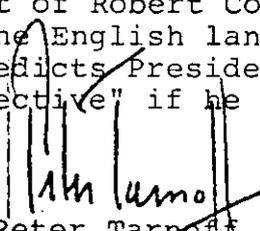
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of reprisal. There has been considerable favorable, independent press comment. Some Brazilian papers, even while supporting the official reaction to foreign government preparation of a Brazil Human Rights Report, criticized human rights violations and called for a domestic investigation. Many democratic opposition parties and groups have hailed our human rights stand, including the Christian Democrats in Chile, the PRD in the Dominican Republic, some factions of the MDB in Brazil, and the opposition coalition in El Salvador. Catholic church representatives have commented very favorably. And there have been warm words of praise and encouragement from influential intellectuals, journalists, sociologists, etc. Once again, this positive reaction has not been uniform. Various supporters (e.g., some Latin American government officials as well as leaders of the Buenos Aires Jewish community) have quietly cautioned against pushing so hard publicly as to make repressive regimes feel they are being cornered, thus leading them to take even harsher measures.

It is, of course, far too early to make any definitive judgments as to the net impact of our current human rights policy. Many Latin leaders are still trying to sort out where they stand in the face of what they regard as an onslaught on their legitimacy. Some see, or pretend to see, the most recent public human rights statements by United States Government officials as a backing away, at least to some extent, from our previously voiced high priority for human rights. Latin Americans both in and out of government are watching carefully to see whether and how effectively we intend to continue our present human rights commitment. In this connection, there is attached the revealing March 27 comment of Robert Cox, the courageous British editor of the English language Buenos Aires Herald. Mr. Cox predicts President Carter will become "more and more effective" if he sticks to his guns.


Peter Tarnoff
Executive Secretary

Attachment:

As stated.

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