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# The Emergence of United States Human Rights Policy During Argentina's Dirty War

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### The Emergence of United States Human Rights Policy during Argentina's Dirty War

Argentina's Dirty War from 1976-1983 was an ideological and criminal dictatorship regime that took the lives of approximately 30,000 Argentine people. In America, the 20<sup>th</sup> century's second quarter experienced an ideological paralysis with the cold war and détente negotiations. Consequentially, the United States initially supported Argentina's military regime due to the perception of a strong and independent government resilient to Soviet influences. United States Ambassador to Argentina Robert C. Hill looked to the Argentine generals as a source of stability and implementation of a "moderate government now led by Gen[eral] Videla" to uphold "interests, like ours" and oppose communist forces.<sup>1</sup> Once the atrocities and death tolls began to rise during Carter's presidency, however, the United States started to prioritize global human rights protection over ideological political differences. In other words, Carter's passion for human rights placed the protection of human rights as the keystone of foreign policy.

Human rights networks in the United States and Argentina raised integral awareness of human rights violations and informed key United States policy under Carter's administration during the Dirty War. The Dirty War's emergence after détente's formation forced a shifting definition of non-interference in global affairs to include the protection of human rights, even if intervention and investigation was required. One of the most important policies underlying United States intervention in the Dirty War is the Truman Doctrine, which committed the United

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 9.

States to provide aid (economic and military) to assist countries threatened by communism's infiltration. What happened when such aid supported and funded human rights abuses? In the new era of human rights, United States precedents were challenged: humanitarian protection took priority over upholding doctrines. With the help of nongovernmental organizations and activism campaigns, Carter's administration integrated human rights into congressional policy and took steps to prioritize human rights over politics to globally help people abused by systems of oppression and gross human rights violations.

Considering both Argentina's and the United States' shared passion against communism, Argentina's interest in military dictatorship seemingly aligned with John F. Kennedy's interest in "promoting internal security" in Latin America.<sup>2</sup> Although not readily apparent to Kennedy (and subsequently Nixon), the dictatorship created the opposite effect: extensive human rights abuses. In March 1976, the military took power in Argentina by overthrowing the government in a coup.<sup>3</sup> Before Jorge Rafael Videla spearheaded the military takeover, The Peronist movement – named after Juan Peron - dominated Argentina's last thirty years of government.<sup>4</sup> The Peronism movement was generally associated with liberal and socialist ideas, such as affordable housing and unionized work environments. During the Peronist era, many elections were fraudulent and the power of Congress and the courts were so diluted they became essentially figureheads for a weak government susceptible to the infiltration of power groups (the military, business, and Catholic Church).<sup>5</sup> Years of "political instability, economic stagnation, and social upheaval" in

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<sup>2</sup> William Michael Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere: Human Rights and US Cold War Policy toward Argentina* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 29.

<sup>3</sup> Paul H. Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals: The 'Dirty War' in Argentina* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 4.

<sup>4</sup> United States Embassy Argentina, "PARM--annual policy and resources assessment for Argentina--part I," Cable, (7 April 1977), Digital National Security Archive, <http://www.state.gov/m/a/ips/c22790.htm>. (accessed 7 March 2017), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 3.

Argentina increased the public's disdain for 1975 President Isabel Peron and fueled general support for the military regime.<sup>6</sup> To many Argentines, the new structure offered hope for a different and potentially more stable future with livable wages and abundant economic opportunities.<sup>7</sup> The Radical Civic Union to the Communist Party supported the military regime and justified the coup by accusing the Peronist party lacking "ethical and moral standing" and therefore unable to lead a nation.<sup>8</sup> Tragically, the military regime created clandestine torture facilities and killed approximately 30,000 Argentine citizens from 1976 to 1983. The "Dirty War" was not a war at all, but rather one-sided oppression of any Argentine people suspected to have affiliation with left-wing politics.

Historical precedent and Cold War scars dominated the United States political climate in the 1970s and informed the United States' response to Argentina's atrocities. Since Franklin D. Roosevelt's implementation of the Good Neighbor Policy in 1933, United States foreign relations aimed to support and form relationships with Latin American countries. After Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman accepted the Charter of the Organization of American States which stopped any state from intervening "directly or indirectly, for any reason, whatever, in the external or internal affairs of another state."<sup>9</sup> Both agreements fostered a sense of western hemispheric unity while carefully drawing a line between appropriate (aid) and inappropriate (unwarranted intrusion) intervention. There are several other layers to consider when approaching the United States' role in Argentina's Dirty War. The 1970s in America were

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<sup>6</sup> Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*, 11.

<sup>7</sup> Danielle N. Olean, "Because I Said So: Constructing Identities in Argentina's Dirty War," *University of New Hampshire* (Spring 2013).

<http://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1100&context=honors> (accessed April 2, 2017), 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 15.

characterized by the aftermath of Vietnam's failure and détente's formation and deterioration, likely increasing the United States' motivation to pursue isolationist policy.

Since historical policies often contained conflicting perspectives of Latin American, intervention, clear political ideology and grassroots support influenced the United States' decision to sever its relationship with Argentina on humanitarian grounds. Human rights organizations likely paid no attention to documents governing foreign relations, as their main goal was simply stopping human rights abuse. United States policy, however, was of course more political than human rights organizations. According to the Good Neighbor Policy, the United States was obligated to support Argentina and the military regime of an independent nation. The Charter of the Organization of American States, however, strictly viewed involvement of internal affairs as unjust and excessive. If the United States wanted to maintain a good relationship with Argentina, they had to meticulously weigh the costs and benefits of intervention. Since human rights organizations – at the grassroots and international level – prioritized eradicating human rights abuses over maintaining balanced transnational political alliances, their involvement proved integral to ignite United States human rights policy.<sup>10</sup>

Initially, the United States perceived the military coup as a sign of Argentine independence and strength. Nixon and Kissinger ultimately viewed the military takeover as evidence of Argentina's move towards a strong government, and “Kissinger gave the Argentines the green light” in a private telegram.<sup>11</sup> Essentially, the green light allowed the military coup in Argentina to take any measures possible to restore order in Argentina. As a result, Kissinger's green light message in combination with his general view that “human rights

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<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Cmiel, "The Emergence of Human Rights Politics in the United States," *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December 1, 1999):1231-1250, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2568613> (accessed March 16, 2017), 1232.

<sup>11</sup> Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*, 53.

are not appropriate in a foreign policy context” illustrated callousness and disregard for the human rights violations underway in Argentina.<sup>12</sup> In a meeting between Kissinger and Argentine Foreign Minister Guzzetti, Kissinger demonstrated immense support for the military regime. Kissinger explained that “the quicker you [Argentine military] succeed the better” and expressed stated that Argentine’s military were “friends [that] out to be supported.”<sup>13</sup> According to diplomatic historian Barbara Keys, Kissinger’s private foreign relations and lack of reporting human rights violations to Congress actually formed the groundwork for Congress’ human rights research and pursuit towards placing human rights in United States foreign relations.

Congress’ human rights interest and Carter’s presidency did not immediately mitigate Argentina’s military human rights abuses. According to a 1977 Central Intelligence Agency Memorandum, the Argentine military regime made “substantial progress” in handling “problems of leftist subversives and economic disarray.”<sup>14</sup> The United States Embassy in Argentina wrote an overview of the Argentine climate as of 1977 and the resulting condition of the military’s “cautious course of imposing order, cleaning up the more obvious corruption and economic chaos.”<sup>15</sup> Through depicting the military regime as “imposing order” and “cleaning up,” it became readily apparent that even once Carter was in office, the United States Embassy viewed the sense of order in Argentina as a positive and organizational force rather than a source of tremendous human rights violations. Key players of Carter’s administration eventually learned

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<sup>12</sup> Barbara Keys, “Congress, Kissinger, and the Origins of Human Rights Diplomacy,” *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 5 (November 1, 2010): 832-851.

<http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=b9ccbc19-d314-4a30-920c-e2288c065bb9%40sessionmgr4009&vid=2&hid=4102> (accessed March 15, 2017), 823.

<sup>13</sup> United States Department of State, “*Secretary's Meeting with Argentine Foreign Minister Guzzetti*,” 7 October 1976, Memorandum of Conversation, The National Security Archive, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB104/Doc6%20761007.pdf> (accessed April 10, 2017), 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Intelligence Memorandum: Argentina,” 22 February 1977, Memorandum, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/270391.pdf> (accessed April 30, 2017), 278.

<sup>15</sup> United States Embassy Argentina, PARM, 4.

that the Dirty War was not indicative of a healthy powerful government but rather an abusive regime. With the help of grassroots and international human rights efforts, the United States learned about the gross violations by the military regime and felt compelled to act.

Partially as a result of Kissinger's private diplomacy, Congress began taking the responsibility of human rights investigation and support in their hands near the mid-1970s. Washington's drumming up of human rights policy primed Washington's stage for grassroots and international human rights involvement. Congress, therefore, began pursuing human rights research and interests in the early to mid-1970s, a few years before Carter even came to office.<sup>16</sup> Representative Thomas M. Fraser, member of House International Relations Subcommittee on International Organizations and Movements, played a key role in the integration of human rights foreign policy into United States congressional interest and policy.<sup>17</sup> According to Fraser, if Henry Kissinger had been "less haughty vis-a`-vis the Congress" Congress would not have developed legislation specifically to protect human rights.<sup>18</sup> Fraser's passion and dedication for human rights policy in congressional legislation proved integral during the mid-1970s during Ford's administration.<sup>19</sup> In 1973, Fraser proposed to the House an expansion of the Assistant Secretary's role to advocate for human rights policy and declared the United States responsible to "terminate all military assistance and sales to any government committing serious violations

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<sup>16</sup> William Michael Schmidli, "Human rights and the Cold War: the campaign to halt the Argentine 'dirty war'," *Cold War History* 12, no. 2 (May 2012): 345-365.  
<http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=06df2ec4-2545-4e63-a1f8-09da2431daef%40sessionmgr102&vid=2&hid=121> (accessed March 15, 2017), 348.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 350.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 350.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 350.

of human rights.”<sup>20</sup> Fraser urged Washington’s human rights advocacy several years before the Dirty War’s inception.

While Ford’s administration built relationships with Latin American militaries and later justified economic aid to support the military regime, Fraser and other members of Congress advocated for legislative checks on global human rights conditions.<sup>21</sup> Even before the mid-1970s, Congress was expected to uphold human rights to an extent, but the language in congressional document was often weak, subjective, and difficult to enforce. Human rights section 502B was written in 1961 to flimsily enforce human rights and “promote and encourage increased respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.”<sup>22</sup> At the time of original publication, the document lacked clear definition of human rights and the enforcement of human rights, such as United States foreign aid to countries in violation of human rights abuse. In November of 1975, Fraser “added teeth to 502B” and replaced the ‘sense of Congress’ with legally binding agreement to deny US security assistance to countries violating human rights.<sup>23</sup> Although Ford opposed 502B’s newfound teeth, the bill was passed.<sup>24</sup> Congress exhibited a unified commitment to human rights, and passionate members of Congress set the scene for Carter’s 1977 election and presidential enforcement of human rights policy.

Carter’s presidential platform was not reserved in its passion for human rights policy and prioritizing global protection from gross violations. Only a few months after his presidency, Carter’s Notre Dame Address illustrated Carter’s commitment to his administration’s

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<sup>20</sup> Representative Donald M. Fraser, “All Bill Information (Except Text) for H.R.10455 - A bill to establish within the Department of State a Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs, and for other purposes,” 20 September 1973. 93<sup>rd</sup> Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/93rd-congress/house-bill/10455/all-info>, (accessed April 7, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*.

<sup>22</sup> United Nations, “General Assembly Thirty-fourth Session” November 1979, Meeting Notes, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/34/a34res49.pdf>, (accessed 30 March 2017), 172.

<sup>23</sup> Schmidli, *Human Rights and the Cold War*, 350.

<sup>24</sup> Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*.



transparency and intentional interaction with the American public. Above all, the address underscored human rights as the first of five goals to “reaffirm America’s commitment to human rights as a fundamental tenet of our foreign policy.”<sup>25</sup> Since the United States’ economy was suffering through a period of a domestic economic slump, many of Carter’s critics thought that Carter’s human rights policy was too ideological and negligent of American domestic interests. In the era following détente’s underwhelming results and an American public plagued by the aftermath of Vietnam, Americans might have felt cautious to take a stance of global intervention. United States policy that revolved around global interests might have made the public hesitant to jump on Carter’s platform of global involvement on the grounds of humanitarian aid.

Carter, however, viewed global human rights protection as the cornerstone of sharing United States’ interest of freedom and liberty with the world. According to the October 1977 Department State Bulletin, the results of the Organization of American States General Assembly in Grenada revealed that several other countries expressed interest to join forces with America to prevent human rights violations. At the conference, Resolution 315 was passed to support the Inter-American Human Rights Commission intensive human rights investigations and strict no tolerance stance towards human rights abuses, specifically torture and detention.<sup>26</sup> With global support and recent congressional formation of human rights policy, Carter’s administration received formal support to protect human rights in Argentina and withdraw economic aid to Argentina during the Dirty War. Carter’s presidency from 1977 to 1981 allowed adequate time

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<sup>25</sup> Jimmy Carter, “President Jimmy Carter, Address at the University of Notre Dame, 1977,” in *American Foreign Relations Since 1898*, ed. Jeremi Suri (Hoboken: Blackwell, 2013.), 171.

<sup>26</sup> US Department of State, “The Department of State Bulletin Vol. LXXVII, No. 2000” 24 October 1977, Hein Online, <http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/dsbul77&collection=journals&startid=&end=650&id=615> (accessed 16 March 2017).

for a change in human rights policy and strengthened the relationship between Washington and grassroots human rights organizers, both in America and abroad.

The infancy of the human rights movement during Carter's administrations was not without hiccups and disagreements. Despite the shared interest between Congress and Carter's administration, the relative newness of global human rights enforcement challenged United States officials to formulate an effective methodology to end abuse but maintain a diplomatic relationship with Argentina. According to a 1977 note written by Patricia Derian, Secretary of States of Human Rights, Washington's many working parts lacked cohesion in the execution of human rights policies.<sup>27</sup> The effectiveness of economic sanctions was one of the most contested topics. The 1977 PARM document stated that "sanctions to coerce a change in behavior are both ineffective and counterproductive," which revealed an initial hesitancy to eradicate human rights abuse through economic measures.<sup>28</sup> Although the administration valiantly advocated for human rights protection, the most effective form of implementation was up for debate. Despite reservations of sanctions' effectiveness, nascent human rights policy during the Dirty War exercised economic sanctions as a means of rebuking human rights abuses.

The debate of economic sanctions immensely influenced the development of human rights policy, and the issue remained pertinent considering the United States was sending money to Argentina used to purchase the weapons that tortured and killed Argentine people. Carter's approach to impose economic sanctions as a diplomatic form of negotiations and condemnation offered the first glimpse of human rights integration into United States foreign policy. Economic sanctions sent a clear message to Argentina: countries that violate human rights will not be

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<sup>27</sup> United States Department of State Assistant Secretary for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, "Human Rights Policy" (21 October 1977), Letter of Complaint, Digital National Security Archive, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1679047477?accountid=710> (accessed 15 March 2017).

<sup>28</sup> United States Embassy Argentina, PARM, 8.

supported by the United States. Economic sanctions, however, only began to introduce Carter's administration's dedication to human rights. Leveraging economic power illustrated a classic form of United States diplomacy to establish allies, enemies, and anyone in-between. Carter's true innovation of human rights advocacy stemmed from his thoughtful inclusion of grassroots advocates in United States foreign policy and response to stopping worldwide oppression.

Since the Dirty War targeted activists and presumably left-wing individuals directly, human rights organization in Argentina proved life-threatening. Human rights activists displayed clear opposition to the military regime. In response, the military regime identified activists as left-wing groups who must be silenced. Because of the heightened danger plaguing activists, outside help and pressure from organizations (both government and non-governmental) were key to help stop the human rights abuses. Brave Argentines organized and spurred awareness of the gross human rights violations. One of the most notable advocacy organizations was – and continues to be – *Madres de Plazo de Mayo*, known as “*Madres*.” To this day, the *Madres* march every Thursday in front of *Casa Rosada*, Argentina's most powerful government building, to mourn the loss of “disappeared” children and demand the government's recognition and attempt to reconcile the past human rights abuses. The *Madres* have directly experienced the pain caused by the Dirty War, and their continual marches symbolize peaceful resistance and personal pressure to end the abductions, abuse, and murder under the military regime.<sup>29</sup>

During the Dirty War, the *Madres* worked with The Center of Legal and Social Studies (CELS) to start a reformist movement that demanded the government's “strengthening adherence to existing law as a form of humanitarian governance” rather than writing new laws to promote

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<sup>29</sup> Robert L. Oprisko and Olivia Grace Wolfe, “Resisting Tyranny: Human Rights Organizations, International Organizations, and Promotion of the Rule of Law in Argentina,” *Politics, Bureaucracy, and Justice* 4, no. 2 (2014): 13-26. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2544378> (accessed April 1, 2017), 13.

human rights.<sup>30</sup> The combination of the *Madres* personal protest with the legal advice of CELS proved a powerful union to bring awareness to abuse and democratize Argentina.<sup>31</sup> In 1977, the *Madres* collected a petition with over 24,000 signatures to send to Argentine government and increase internal awareness of the human rights abuse.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, the *Madres* and CELS sent letters to international human rights organizations such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and Amnesty International.<sup>33</sup> Between international traction of the *Madres* marches and established connections with international human rights advocacy, the *Madres* and CELS established international support for Argentina and laid the groundwork for international intervention and investigation. In the 1983 Congressional hearing focused on human rights, CELS presented findings of the experience of 607 Argentine families who reported a “disappeared” family member, documenting that none of the family’s received information from the Argentine government regarding absent family members.<sup>34</sup> As a result, the United Nations Commission for Human Rights called on the Department of State to “re-evaluate its practice of relying on self-serving assertions” regarding the human rights interests of “repressive governments considered ‘friendly’ to the United States.”<sup>35</sup> CELS’ findings brought awareness to human rights violations and integrated the findings into Congress.

In the United States, human rights organizations began to gain more momentum in the mid-1970s and eventually formed partnerships with Argentina to work together against human

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<sup>30</sup> Oprisko and Wolfe, “Resisting Tyranny,” 16.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>34</sup> Human rights in Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations and on Western Hemisphere Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representative, 98<sup>th</sup> Congress., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., October 4 and 21, 1983. *HathiTrust Digital Library*.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31210011734462;view=1up;seq=15>. (accessed April 25, 2017), 33.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

rights abuses. Activists in the 1970s invented a form of “post-populist reform style” to emphasize pressuring political leaders rather than focus on mass mobilization.<sup>36</sup> The human rights movement transformed policy by emphasizing pressure on political leaders instead of simply organizing many people interested in human rights. In this way, the human rights movement became more strategic and required less human capital to achieve greater political victories. Since the United States was struggling with a slugging domestic economy, human rights activists in the United States had to convince the public and policy-makers of the importance of human rights over domestic interests. The United States prides itself on international support and providing a moral compass for the world, so integrating human rights into policy required strong networks of international alliances to prove that human rights is a global issue, not merely a phase in US interest.<sup>37</sup>

Human rights efforts in the non-governmental United States sector often utilized tactics from the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements, such as mass mobilization and letter-writing on behalf of Argentina’s prisoners, to attract attention to the movement.<sup>38</sup> In response to international attention, The United Nations Working Group on Disappearances (established in 1980) communicated with various non-governmental organizations to connect individual experiences into mass documentation of human rights abuse.<sup>39</sup> The Working Group compiled 1,377 disappearance cases for submission to the Argentine government.<sup>40</sup> Resistance to the Dirty War depended on transnational collaboration and communication to reveal human rights violation and foster support. In the age of developing technology, the human rights movement in the United States often relied on fast communication through telephone and media’s emergence

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<sup>36</sup> Cmiel, "The Emergence" 1240.

<sup>37</sup> Cmiel, "The Emergence" 1239.

<sup>38</sup> Schmidli, *Human Rights and the Cold War*, 354.

<sup>39</sup> Human rights in Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay: Hearings, 11.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

to learn about and become involved in international movements.<sup>41</sup> The publicity from mass mobilization fueled human rights groups to lobby Congress and influence Washington's international policymaking by the mid-1970s.<sup>42</sup> Similar to human rights efforts in Argentina, organizers in the United States combined awareness of atrocities and publication to propagate the urgency of human rights policy to restore the rights of Argentines during the Dirty War.

Between human rights organization and interests blossoming in both United States and Argentina, the connection between both countries presented a passionate ideological partnership to end the abuse of the Dirty War. Activists' shared concern for the freedom, respect, and liberty of all people transcended political interests and placed the common cause of humanitarian aid at the forefront. With a clear commitment on behalf of both Argentines and Americans, United States officials began opening doors to international human rights organizations to offer a comprehensive perspective of Argentina's situation. The international nature of human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights First, and the International League of Human Rights gave a sense of official legitimacy and power to the grassroots activism.<sup>43</sup>

Despite what appeared to be a sudden interest in human rights and international protection of rights for all, the human rights rhetoric took a direct place in law almost thirty years ago by the United Nations. The international human rights organization stated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights that "human rights should be protected by the rule of law" to life.<sup>44</sup> Human rights ideas in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, tended to be pushed aside in the name of the Cold War. Furthermore, human rights in the context of the United Nations potentially positioned human rights more as a political policy initiative than an

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<sup>41</sup> Cmiel, "The Emergence" 1238.

<sup>42</sup> Schmidli, *Human Rights and the Cold War*, 358.

<sup>43</sup> Cmiel, "The Emergence of Human Rights Politics in the United States," 1243.

<sup>44</sup> United Nations. "1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights" 10 December 1948.

apolitical preservation of humanity. Once human rights non-governmental and international organizations acted against abuse in the 1970s, human rights became “chic” and a movement that gained publicity.<sup>45</sup> The mid-1970s presented optimal timing for an international human rights movement: Carter’s presidency with human rights as the main focus, the age of information, and growing grassroots movements that exposed worldwide violations.

Human rights were flourishing at the grassroots and international level, and Washington was ready to engage with many different organizations as a method of informing policy. Jimmy Carter’s Presidential Directive on February 17, 1978 outlined Carter’s goals for United States human rights policy. Carter stated that the United States should “use its full range of diplomatic tools” that included non-governmental organizations and international organizations.<sup>46</sup> The message demonstrated passionate endorsement of a comprehensive human rights policy to leverage all sources of knowledge and power to help end the abuse taking place in Argentina’s Dirty War. Congress would not be restricted to governmental influence of Washington. Instead, Congress would integrate lawyers, non-governmental organizations, and Argentine voices into policy-making. The United States Embassy in Argentina was in full agreement with Carter and outlined human rights protections as a “priority to those involving illegal, detention, torture, and execution.”<sup>47</sup> Argentina’s annual assessment continued to express a desire in policy to consult with embassies of other nations and private organizations to make balanced, informed decisions.

Washington’s and Argentina’s willingness to supplement the political approach of human rights with international opinion and non-governmental organizations demonstrated a transnational movement that united people based off protection from abuse, regardless of

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<sup>45</sup> Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*, 56.

<sup>46</sup> Jimmy Carter, “Human Rights,” Presidential Directive (17 February 1981), *Digital National Security Archive*, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1679039472?accountid=7103> (accessed 5 March 2017).

<sup>47</sup> United States Embassy Argentina, PARM, 6.

political affiliation. There are several examples of Americans and Argentines working together to present before Congress. The New York Bar Association visited Argentina to understand the conditions and testified on behalf of the Argentines in United States Congress in 1979.<sup>48</sup> An international organization, *Comision Argentina por los Derechos Humanos* (CADHU), established national branches to form an investigative team to gather Argentine human rights abuse information and presented findings to the United States House Subcommittee on Human Rights.<sup>49</sup> In Argentina, the United States Embassy similarly worked with United States lawyers to prepare arguments at the Inter-American Human Rights Conference.<sup>50</sup> At the IAHR conference, lawyers strategized between prominent human rights organizations such as League for the Rights of Man and Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights to expose and extinguish the human rights violation of Argentina's Dirty War that had so far taken at least 15,000 lives.<sup>51</sup> Extensive collaboration between borders, ideas, and organization structure yielded immense connectivity and fuel to push back against the Dirty War in a multi-dimensional and informed fashion.

The growing support for human rights at an international and grassroots level was mirrored with structural and policy changes in Washington. Although the integration of human rights into policy in Washington was certainly a team effort, congressional representative and chairman of the House International Relations Subcommittee on International Organizations and Movements Donald M. Fraser played a key role. As previously mentioned, Fraser began pioneering human rights work in Washington around 1973, but his work continued into Carter's

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<sup>48</sup> Alison Brysk, "From above and below social movements, the international system, and human rights in Argentina," *Comparative Political Studies* 26, no. 3 (January 1993): 259

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>50</sup> United States Embassy, Argentina, "Visit of IAHR--Human Rights Organization's Preparations and Concerns" 23 January 1979, Confidential Cable, Digital National Security Archive, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1679047265?accountid=7103> (accessed 7 March 2017).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*



administration and proved essential to codifying the interests, concerns, and teamwork of grassroots and international human rights organizers. Fraser's team hosted congressional hearings to learn more about international human rights abuses, and about 150 cases were heard from 1973-1978.<sup>52</sup> In a September 1976 congressional session, the Subcommittee on International Relations heard from a variety of Argentine witnesses, ranging from a priest, lawyer, and a member of the Argentine Commission on Human Rights.<sup>53</sup> Father James Weeks of the *La Sallette* Mission Society shared his seminary's experience with the Argentine military, vividly re-telling the military's abrupt break-in to Weeks' home and "search for arms and subversive literature."<sup>54</sup> Weeks continued to explain that his investigation – and the imprisonment of his 5 seminarians – was not an isolated, unique event but rather one example of the many human rights violations underway.<sup>55</sup> As illustrated, Fraser's congressional hearings included a variety of perspectives and increased collaboration between Washington and Argentine people. Teamwork proved an essential element utilized by the United States to stand in solidarity with and create policies to support with victims of the Dirty War. Furthermore, Fraser created a Department of State Bureau of Human Rights to induce a sense of permanence to the human rights policies emerging in the 1970s.<sup>56</sup>

Soon after the committee's formation, Carter issued a complete arms embargo with Argentina to demonstrate condemnation of human rights violations. In a 1978 telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Argentina, The Secretary decided that "we cannot go

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<sup>52</sup> Schmidli, *Human Rights and the Cold War*, 348.

<sup>53</sup> Human rights in Argentina: Hearings before the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, 94<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., September 28 and 29, 1976, *HathiTrust Digital Library*.  
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015081204516;view=1up;seq=1>. (accessed April 25, 2017), 2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Schmidli, *Human Rights and the Cold War*, 359.

forward, as hoped, with military training packages and defense,” partially influenced by Inter-American Commission on Human Rights’ evaluation of Argentina’s human rights violations.<sup>57</sup> The Argentine Navy soon sent an evaluation of the “termination of US bilateral military assistance” to the US Department of State to express that the Argentine military would connect with other countries, such as the eager Soviet Union, to achieve military support.<sup>58</sup> Argentine Navy viewed the embargo’s impact on human rights “probably limited” due to Argentina’s sovereignty.<sup>59</sup> Regardless, the United States arms embargo sent a clear signal to Argentina: the US refused to support countries undertaking human rights abuse. In a 1977 presidential memorandum, President Carter voiced his concern about human rights pressure and foreign relations. In Carter’s words, “pressures for human rights and non-proliferation have raised new fears about U.S. intervention and paternalism.”<sup>60</sup> Despite the “new fears,” Carter’s policies continued to prioritize human rights. Ultimately, Carter’s administration deemed Argentina’s devastating human rights violations as paramount compared to the risks of intervention.

In addition to an arms embargo, Carter’s administration practiced an inverse relationship between human rights abuse and economic aid. To measure the relationship between human rights and economic investment, scholars of human rights and economic aid established the Freedom House human rights score to operationalize human rights abuse on a scale from one to

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<sup>57</sup> United States Department of State, “*Human Rights and U.S. Programs in Argentina*,” 26 June 1978, Telegram. U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/270391.pdf> (accessed April 30, 2017).

<sup>58</sup> United States Embassy, Argentina, “Political Effects of Embargo” 1 June 1979, Confidential Cable, Digital National Security Archive, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1679048390?accountid=7103>, (accessed April 6, 2017).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> United States Department of State, “*Presidential Review Memorandum/Nsc-17 United States Policy Toward Latin America: Overview*” 23 February 1977, Memorandum. Carter Library, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/270391.pdf> (accessed April 30, 2017), 19.

seven, with seven exhibiting severe violations of “civil and political rights.”<sup>61</sup> For every one-point rise in a country’s human rights score in 1978, Carter’s administration cut aid by 19 million dollars.<sup>62</sup> Since Argentina’s human rights score was 4.46 in 1978, the Argentines lost about eighty-five million dollars in aid.<sup>63</sup> After congressional changes and the United States arms embargo with Argentina, Washington officials continued dialogue with Argentine officials to fully communicate the intent of economic sanctions, arms embargo, and investigations of human rights violations. In 1979, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights Patricia Derian spoke with an Argentine businessman Mr. Rozenblum to discuss both economic impacts of recent congressional policy and the thought process of the United States behind the ban of arms sales.<sup>64</sup> Ms. Derian emphasized the United States desire to avoid supporting Argentina’s regime, though not to become a punitive enemy, with a country engaging in human rights abuse. Implementation of Carter’s human rights policies, therefore, relied on personal communication between United States officials in Washington and Argentine citizens in power. United States officials’ follow through with Argentine’s citizens and military leaders demonstrated a commitment to better understand the reaction and impact of United States policy to reduce human rights abuse.

In December of 1983, democracy was restored to Argentina, and the military government was replaced by President Raul Alfonsin.<sup>65</sup> The tragic “disappearance” of approximately 30,000 Argentines, however, will continue to live in the historical memory of Argentina and the entire

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<sup>61</sup> Steven C. Poe, "Human rights and economic aid allocation under Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter," *American Journal of Political Science* (February 1992): 147-167.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2111428> (accessed March 17, 2017), 151.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 161.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 165.

<sup>64</sup> States Department of State Bureau of Human Rights and, Humanitarian Affairs, “Human Rights Policy toward Argentina,” 17 January 1979, Memorandum of Conversation, Digital National Security Archive, <http://foia.state.gov/SearchColls/CollsSearch.asp> (accessed 5 March 2017).

<sup>65</sup> Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

world. To this day, Argentine military officials are on trial for human rights abuses of torture and death during the Dirty War. The Argentine government established Day of Remembrance for Truth and Justice annually on March 24 to mourn the lives lost in the Dirty War and remind Argentines that trials continue to bring awareness and justice to the regime's offenders. Many mothers and fathers have yet to receive confirmation of their child's "disappearance" and must live everyday urging the government to divulge the full list victim list and help each affected person mourn and receive closure. The tragedy's devastating impact on Argentines cannot be underscored enough.

United States' involvement in the Dirty War set crucial precedents for collaboration between grassroots, international, and government entities all linking arms to resist abuse and advocate for all. Washington Post's 1984 piece "Argentines Thank Carter for Human Rights efforts" offers a glimpse into the United States policy's impact to support the rights of people detained during the Dirty War. Although the human rights policies might have "eluded him [Carter] at home," Carter was praised and revered for organizing United States aid (the most helpful country to Argentina, according to some).<sup>66</sup> Despite the human rights efforts, author Martin Anderson expressed weariness about human rights future in the hands of Ronald Reagan, who aimed to support all "strong governments that are our friends."<sup>67</sup> Although Reagan certainly did not prioritize human rights with the same passion as Carter, Reagan's financial policies mirrored that of Carter and strongly correlated United States economic aid with a country's respect for human rights.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Martin Anderson. "Argentines Thank Carter for Human Rights Efforts," *The Washington Post*, October 10, 1984. <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.trinity.edu/docview/138149415?accountid=7103> (accessed March 7, 2017).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> David Carleton and Michael Stohl, "The foreign policy of human rights: Rhetoric and reality from Jimmy Carter to Ronald Reagan," *Human Rights Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (May 1985): 205-229.

Even though Reagan did not share the same emphasis of human rights policy, Carter's administration incorporated human rights policy into congress and built strong relationships with international and grassroots organizations. The relationships formed cannot be ignored and set an expectations of human rights policy for subsequent administrations. Carter's administration is often criticized for lack of cohesion in human rights policy and its application, but the human rights movement started to "raise the world's consciousness of human rights, and thus provided a measure of hope for the victims."<sup>69</sup> The human rights movement that emerged during the Dirty War established transnational ties predicated on the shared will to preserve the rights and dignity of all people.

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