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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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