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From 39 to Brasília: the relationship between President Carter and Brazil

by

Lucas de Souza Martins

Under the Direction of Alex Sayf Cummings, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2021

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the relationship between President Jimmy Carter's administration (1977-1981) and Brazil's military regime, which was led by two generals, President Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979) and President João Figueiredo (1979-1985). Illuminating the risks that Washington takes as it implements foreign policies without considering the political landscape abroad, this work argues that Carter's foreign policy failed in the relationship with Brazil. It undermined the diplomatic dialogue and negotiation with the largest economy in Latin America, irritated Brazilians from all parts of the political spectrum, and failed to achieve improvements in human rights.

INDEX WORDS: Jimmy Carter, Human Rights, Brazil, Ernesto Geisel, João Figueiredo, Dictatorship, Military regime

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2021

From 39 to Brasília: the relationship between President Carter and Brazil

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May 2021

## **DEDICATION**

To my grandparents, Joaquim Martins, Josefa Cardoso, José Lima, and Maria Souza.

I stand on your shoulders.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would not be here without my savior Jesus Christ. I thank my parents, Gilberto and Jorgete Martins, for teaching me His word since I was a child. I also thank my fiancée, Ana Carolina Barbosa, for her prayers and so many words of encouragement throughout this journey.

This master thesis would not be concluded without the precious support of the members of my committee, Dr. Alex Sayf Cummings and Dr. J. T. Way. I also highlight the help of so many competent mentors and friends that I met during my Atlanta experience who helped me with ideas and great advice: U.S. Senator Reverend Dr. Raphael Warnock, Georgia State Representative Park Cannon, Brazilian Ambassador Carlos Henrique de Abreu, Dr. Trudi Williams, Reverend Bronson Woods, Reverend Chelsea Waite, Reverend Darien Waite, Reverend Kamilah Bradley, Reverend Carl Young, Reverend Michael Martin, Lucia Jennings, Daniel Almeida, Navosha Copeland, Michelle Miller, Carliss Mallory, Errol Mallory, Kipling Dunlap, Vickie Johnson, Lydia Williams, Gaye Hyman, Lamar Lake, Carolyn Lake, Jimmy Biggs, William McCalop, Paul Brown, Vivian Brown, Karyn Lacy, Ida Catlin, Victor Wilcher, Debbie Jeffers, Colleen Perry, Brian Mitchell, Ashley Watts, Caroline Gilling, Erin Porter, Vanessa Ibarra, Cesar Vence, Paulina Guzman, and Meredith Steinmetz-Rodriguez.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 A Statement of the Thesis

This thesis explores the relationship between President Jimmy Carter's administration (1977-1981) and Brazil's military regime, which was led by two generals—President Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979) and President João Figueiredo (1979-1985). Despite his message around the importance of human rights and his critiques of Latin American dictatorships, Carter's White House ended up being pragmatic in its connections with Brasília. In the first year of this term, U.S. foreign policy annoyed the Brazilian government as Washington attempted to force West Germany to cancel a nuclear agreement established with Brazil in 1975—an initiative that failed. Moreover, the First Lady's visit to the country in 1977 also irritated Brasília due to the way Rosalynn Carter interacted with politicians from the opposition and activists against the regime. As a response to Carter's approach, the Brazilian government decided to revoke its 25-year mutual defense treaty with the United States.

Under the pressure of American enterprises with businesses in Brazil, the press, and the U.S. Congress, the White House started a new strategy to reconnect with the officials of the largest economy in Latin America. In his visit to Brasília to meet Ernesto Geisel in 1977, Carter did not criticize the regime or make statements on human rights. Nevertheless, Brazil's government and the opposition—neither of which had appreciated American interference in local matters in the previous year—continued to reject new agreements and initiatives with their U.S. counterparts. Beyond that, President Geisel rejected an official invitation by the White House to visit Washington. His successor, President João Figueiredo, did not show interest in establishing

deep ties with Carter's administration. Meanwhile, Brasília went ahead with its nuclear program with West Germany and developed a diplomatic approach to Portuguese-speaking African nations, especially Angola—whose government was ideologically close to the Soviet Union.

This work shows how Carter's foreign policy, therefore, failed in the relationship with Brazil. It undermined diplomatic dialogue and negotiation with the largest economy in Latin America, irritated Brazilians (from all political views) with its attempt to interfere in the nuclear agreement with West Germany, and failed to achieve improvements in human rights. Lastly, this thesis reflects on the risks that Washington takes as it implements foreign policies without considering the political landscape abroad. It may lead to the loss of crucial partners and affects not only the relationship between two governments, but also between two States.

## **1.2 Historiography and Context**

When President James Earl Carter Jr. took office in 1977, Brazil was facing a military dictatorship, which started in 1964 when President João Goulart (1961-1964) was removed from office. Re-democratization was not consolidated in the Latin American country until 1985, four years after the end of Carter's presidency, when Tancredo de Almeida Neves, a civilian politician, was elected the new head of state. In keeping with its Cold War policy of shoring up anticommunist regimes, the U.S. had supported the Brazilian military government for years. In a bilateral meeting with President Emílio Garrastazu Médici (1969-1974), U.S. President Richard Nixon (1969-1974) emphasized that Brazil was in good hands thanks to the country's economic staff. In his speech, Garrastazu Médici stressed his faith in a lasting partnership between the two

countries.<sup>1</sup> President Gerald Ford (1974-1977) also viewed Brazil as an indispensable regional ally.<sup>2</sup> The military government's human rights abuses were little obstacle to a good relationship with Washington.

As explained by the historian Thomas E. Skidmore, U.S.-Brazilian relations degenerated considerably when Jimmy Carter won the 1976 presidential election. "President Carter's campaign had the pledge to restore transparency and morality to Washington," he wrote.<sup>3</sup> "Considering the military regime's human rights abuses, it seemed inevitable that (President Ernesto) Geisel and Carter would butt heads."<sup>4</sup> Scholars like historian William Michael Schmidli state that the emergence of the human rights movement (by the mid-1970s) was crucial to promoting Carter's election, because U.S. public opinion had turned against supporting right-wing dictatorships not only in Latin America but also in Asia (South Korea) and Africa (Rhodesia).<sup>5</sup> In his inaugural speech, the 39th President of the United States emphasized that "we can never be indifferent to the fate of freedom elsewhere"—a quote that inspired Schmidli's book title, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*, which explored the U.S. Cold War policies towards Latin America with a focus on Argentina.<sup>6</sup>

An analysis regarding the U.S. support for dictatorships around the world comes from David F. Schmitz, who writes that the promotion of democracy—in opposition to communism—was not a consistent, central goal of the United States: "the history of supporting

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<sup>1</sup> Renata Fratton Noronha and Waldemar Dalenogare Neto, "De Brasília a Washington: Relações de Moda e Poder a partir do encontro Nixon-Medici," *VII Congresso Internacional de História*, <https://bit.ly/36yLtlG>, (Porto Alegre: XX Semana de História, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas E. Skidmore, "Geisel," *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*, <https://library.brown.edu/create/fivecenturiesofchange/chapters/chapter-7/military-rule/geisel/>, (Providence: Brown University Library Center for Digital Scholarship, 2009).

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

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> William Michael Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere: Human Rights and U.S. Cold War Policy Toward Argentina* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

authoritarian regimes cannot be dismissed or ignored in evaluating American foreign policy since 1965,” the author states.<sup>7</sup> He argues that Jimmy Carter was the first U.S. President ever to implement a foreign policy based on the promotion of democracy and human rights.<sup>8</sup> João Henrique Roriz, a Brazilian scholar, sees Carter’s election as a “turning point”<sup>9</sup> in the relationship between Washington and Brasília and approaches its repercussions in the diplomatic field. He says that right after Carter’s victory, a memorandum was sent from the capital of Brazil to all major Brazilian embassies in Europe and also D.C. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs predicted that the “observed changes in the international political context seem to indicate that the attention given by the world community to human rights issues would not wane, but instead experience a possible intensification, which would have implications and repercussions in multilateral and bilateral forums.”<sup>10</sup> Sidnei Munhoz and Francisco Silva, who are also historians from Brazil, agree with this perspective. Their work approaches the history of Brazil-United States relations during the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. Both argue that the issue of human rights abroad came to the fore when Carter took office.

However, Munhoz and Silva add that the President’s real goal was to loudly denounce violations against the human rights of Soviet dissidents. “His credibility, however, required that the official discourse had to be universalized, embracing all authoritarian governments, even those of countries which were friends.”<sup>11</sup> In his book *The Last Utopia*, historian Samuel Moyn stresses that neoconservatives understood Carter’s agenda on human rights as “anticommunism

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<sup>7</sup> David F. Schmitz, *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1965-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5.

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

<sup>9</sup> João Henrique Roriz, “Clashing frames: human rights and foreign policy in the Brazilian re-democratization process.” *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Nov 2017), 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Sidnei Munhoz and Francisco Silva, *Brazil-United States relations: XX and XXI centuries* (Maringá: Eduem, 2013), 208.

by other name.”<sup>12</sup> Moyn also mentions the complaints by Noam Chomsky about Carter’s policies in March 1977. According to the far-left activist and critic, “the human rights campaign is a device to be manipulated by propagandists to gain popular support for counter-revolutionary intervention.”<sup>13</sup>

Other authors explore the connection between President Carter and a group of activists that introduced human rights issues in Latin America to the American audience. According to historian and Brazilianist James Green, these activities were essential to isolating the military regime and facilitating the creation of a broader solidarity movement concerned about democracy in the region during the late 1970s.<sup>14</sup> In her book, *Jimmy Carter, Human Rights, and the National Agenda*, political scientist Mary E. Stucey analyzes Carter’s speech at the University of Notre Dame in 1977 to highlight the president’s connection to the pro-human rights activists in attendance. On that occasion, the U.S. President received an honorary degree together with pro-human rights activists from Brazil, South Korea, and Rhodesia (something that will be explored in the second chapter of this thesis). Stucey further argues that Carter’s foreign policy encouraged the release of political prisoners not only in Brazil, but also in Indonesia, South Korea, the Philippines, and Cuba: “under Carter human rights had achieved an unprecedented level of international attention and acclaim, and that provided at least some impetus for presidents for presidents to continue some sort of human rights,” she writes.<sup>15</sup>

This thesis goes beyond the analysis of presidential speeches or connections with activists before and after the campaign. It calls attention to a debate that describes the pragmatism of Carter’s administration and how his foreign policy brought risks to DC in its relationship with a

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<sup>12</sup> Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 157.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> James Green, *We Cannot Remain Silent: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 346.

<sup>15</sup> Mary E. Stuckey, *Jimmy Carter, Human Rights, and the National Agenda* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 133.

strategic partner in Latin America. This work analyzes how the foreign policies of Jimmy Carter's White House resonated internally in Brazil, and how this in turn affected Brasília's relationship with Washington.

### **1.3 Sources, Method, and Outline of Chapters**

Since this research aims to explore how the press in the United States and Brazil reported the political landscape in Brasília and its relationship with President Jimmy Carter's administration, it will explore the archives of American newspapers and magazines such as *The New York Times* (the news organization that won more Pulitzer Prizes), *The New Republic* (founded by liberal intellectuals in 1914), *The National Review* (founded in 1955 as a magazine of conservative opinion), and *The Nation* (founded by abolitionists in 1865). These archives are available through *Georgia State University* library's virtual databases. Additionally, sources in Portuguese are available; the major Brazilian newspapers offer free access to their virtual archives. For the purpose of this thesis, *Folha de S. Paulo* (which has the largest circulation currently in the country), *O Estado de S. Paulo* (the newspaper that has the second-largest circulation in the city of São Paulo, behind only *Folha*), and *O Globo* (the most prominent publication in the *Globo Group* media conglomerate, the largest mass media group in Latin America). The *Biblioteca da Presidência da República do Brasil* (The Library of the Presidency of the Republic of Brazil) provides all public statements of President Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979) and President João Figueiredo (1979-1985). Similarly, President Jimmy Carter's speeches are preserved in his administration's public papers.

Just as this thesis draws on primary sources from the United States and Brazil, it also references secondary works from both nations. Notably, these include the publications of the historian James Green, which analyze the connections between Washington DC and Brasília during the Brazilian military regime (1964-1985). His book, *We Cannot Remain Silent: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States*, for example, is a result of the author's interviews with many of the activists who educated U.S. journalists, government officials, and the public opinion about the violence taking place in Brazil. My analysis contextualizes the insights of Green's work within the greater landscape of American geopolitics, as described in historical works such as *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships*, by David Schmitz, which examines the U.S. policy towards right-wing dictatorships from 1960 to the end of the Cold War. This literature is complemented by the work of the Brazilian historians Francisco Silva and Sidnei Munhoz, *Brazil-United States relations: XX and XXI centuries*, which describes how D.C. interacted with Brasília from the 1964 Brazilian coup d'état to the re-democratization process finalized in 1985. Finally, I attempt to frame my own analysis within the context of the broader scope of Brazilian social, cultural, political, and economic history, as traced by Thomas Skidmore in *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*.

The thesis consists of this introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. The first chapter ("The Political Landscape: Before and During the 1976 U.S. Presidential Election") describes how the Brazilian and the American media reported Carter's campaign and how they reported the political environment in Latin America (LATAM) and Brazil during the presidential election and the transition to the new administration. Continuing the analysis of media coverage, the second chapter ("The New President and the Relationship with Brasília") explores President Jimmy Carter's diplomacy towards Brazil, focusing on the First Lady Rosalynn Carter's visit to the



South American country in 1977 and the presidential visit to Brasília in the following year. The last chapter (“The Impact of Carter’s Visit and the Relationship with President Figueiredo”) analyzes the lasting impact of President Carter's visit in the relationship between the two countries, tracing how it developed in the years ahead, during the presidency of General João Figueiredo (1979-1985). It also explores the Brazilian gradual re-democratization process, including the Amnesty Law (1979), the end of the two-party system, and the Institutional Act Number Five (the most repressive law of Brazil's regime) and how the White House reacted to this political landscape in Brasília.

## 2 BEFORE AND DURING THE 1976 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

### 2.1 Summary

This first chapter describes how the Brazilian and American media reacted to Jimmy Carter's campaign and his election in 1976 and how they reported the political landscape in Latin America and Brazil. It shows the pragmatism of the Democratic campaign's approach to the issues of human rights that did not necessarily represent the candidate's or the party's ideological agenda. During his gubernatorial campaign in 1970, for example, Carter ran as moderate and was careful on race-sensitive matters since the subject could affect his candidacy in a Southern state.<sup>16</sup> Beyond that, after his election, the Governor of Georgia met with President Emilio Médici in 1972, the third head of state of the Brazilian military, and did not share statements of concern regarding human rights in his trip to Brazil.<sup>17</sup>

As it is possible to learn through articles published by the American press throughout the presidential elections in 1976, the verbal attacks of the Democratic campaign in 1976 against Brasília had the goal of pleasing both liberal and conservative voters. The first ones were interested in the fight for human rights around the globe, while the second group was seeking stability in a country that had an unpopular government among its citizens at that point. The reaction in Brazil to such rhetoric, and to the policies that followed from it, however, were not what the Carter administration expected. The regime's leaders sought support outside of U.S. influence—as seen in its nuclear agreement with West Germany—and defied the United States by supporting the new Soviet-backed administration in Angola established in 1975.

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<sup>16</sup> *O Globo*, “A discreta passagem por Brasília em 72,” November 4, 1976, 2.

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

## 2.2 The USA's landscape and its Relationship with Latin America

In the 1976 U.S. presidential election, neither of the candidates had been elected president before. The Republican head of state, Gerald R. Ford, lacked enthusiastic support from his party establishment and was associated in voters' minds with the Watergate scandal.<sup>18</sup> Ford was not perceived as dishonest or corrupt himself, but he could not escape the taint of his association with former President Richard M. Nixon.<sup>19</sup> His campaign was also weakened in the primary by a challenge from the former Governor of California, Ronald Reagan (1967-1975), who would be elected president four years later. Considering that the nation was fatigued with Watergate and its repercussions, voters were seeking a clean break with the past. As explained by Paul Christiansen, Associated Professor at Setton Hall University's College of Communication and the Arts, who analyzed the Democratic Party's campaign ads of that year for his book *Orchestrating Public Opinion: How Music Persuades in Television Political Ads for U.S. Presidential Campaigns*, "since Ford was so intimately connected with Nixon's scandal—despite widespread voter opinion that Ford himself was uninvolved—many people wanted to vote for change."<sup>20</sup> Prior to his presidential bid, Carter's public service experience included a stint in the U.S. Navy, two senate terms in the Georgia General Assembly, and one term as governor of Georgia (1971-1975).<sup>21</sup> Foreign affairs were a difficult subject during Carter's candidacy. It was challenging for the Democratic Party in 1976 to criticize the Republicans, who had ended the war in Vietnam and were pursuing détente with the Soviet Union and a new relationship with

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Christiansen, *Orchestrating Public Opinion: How Music Persuades in Television Political Ads for US Presidential Campaigns, 1952–2016* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018). Accessed January 10, 2021. doi:10.2307/j.ctv8pzcv5.

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

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Gary M. Fink, *The New Georgia Encyclopedia Companion to Georgia Literature*, edited by Hugh Ruppensburg and John C. Inscoe (University of Georgia Press, 2007), 68.

China. Carter was generally in favor of those policies.<sup>22</sup> The historian Gary Fink highlights that the Democrat politician ended up with a strategy that would criticize the Nixon-Ford administration for its neglect of human rights and for its support for dictatorial regimes in Chile and on the Indian sub-continent.<sup>23</sup> “Human rights were an ideal issue for candidate Carter. It united a political party that, at that time, included both conservative cold warriors and liberal anti-war candidates”, he writes.<sup>24</sup>

This electoral strategy seemed to be correct since the debate around Latin American dictatorships’ violations of human rights was being discussed by the U.S. press throughout the 1970s. In March 1976, *The New Republic* magazine published an article about Chile’s prize-winning boy scout, Pedro Huertas, a 20-year-old with no political connections or charges against him “who was subject to a range of torture in places like Chile, Uruguay and Brazil.”<sup>25</sup> Like other young people of his age, he was involved with politics at a grassroots level—community centers, student and faculty groups—and was a supporter of Chile’s left-wing former President Salvador Allende. Right after a speech by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) on the floor of the Senate, in which the legislator asked why Huertas’s exile request to the U.S. was still pending approval from the American government, the young activist was taken from prison in his country and put on a plane to California.<sup>26</sup> The same article also mentions that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had suggested setting up a committee to study the nature and extent of torture in the world, and then United Nations Ambassador Daniel Patrick Moynihan asked for amnesty for political prisoners everywhere. Nine months later, another article by *The New Republic*’s columnist John Hersey criticized the American “business morality” that tainted the

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 68.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 69.

<sup>25</sup> Rose Styron, “America’s Repressive Ally: Torture in Chile,” *The New Republic*, March 20, 1976, 15-17.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*.

country's pretensions to concern for racial and economic justice and for peace. "I need only mention the interests of corporations in such resources as the gold, chrome and asbestos of Rhodesia; the manganese, copper, antimony, nickel, tin and uranium of South Africa; the nitrates and cooper of Chile; the oil of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Venezuela", he wrote.<sup>27</sup> "These business interests have directly affected our policies on apartheid, the Palestinians, Israel, Latin American dictatorships", the author concluded.<sup>28</sup>

Among conservative voters, the idea of criticizing Latin American dictatorships was also appropriate since some governments in the region had adopted an independent foreign policy that was out of U.S. control. The importance of having a stabilized LATAM under Washington's influence had to do with economic reasons. As explained by the President of the Inter-American Development Bank, Ortiz Mena (1971-1988), the Latin-American countries "were a positive factor"<sup>29</sup> in the economic push of the United States in the second half of the 1970s. From 1972 to 1975, the U.S. increased its exports to LATAM from US\$ 6 billion to US\$ 18 billion annually.<sup>30</sup> In its approach to the apprehensions concerning the relationship between the United States and LATAM, the conservative magazine *National Review* mentioned the concern regarding Cuban and Soviet influence in the region. On that matter, the publication accused the right-wing Venezuelan government of being "cocky, perhaps even complacent about the threat of Caribbean Communism."<sup>31</sup> The reason why the article criticized (and expected more from) Caracas had to do with the fact that former Venezuelan President Romulo Bettancour was nominated by the magazine as the political godfather of President Carlos Andrés Pérez (1974-1979).<sup>32</sup> The

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<sup>27</sup> John Hersey, "An Inaugural Address," *The New Republic*, December 11, 1976, 17-19.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Folha de S. Paulo*, "Carter e a América Latina," November 4, 1976, 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *National Review*, "Venezuela Looks Around," November 11, 1976, 1307.

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

*National Review* presented Bettancourt as the South-American leader who was “substantially”<sup>33</sup> responsible for the boycott of Fidel Castro (Cuba’s Prime Minister) by the Organization of American States in 1962. “If Fidel Castro, financed by the Soviet Union, (begins) to extend his empire, for instance into Jamaica, and then hopscotch his way east along the Caribbean... would Venezuela (react to that)?”, it asked.<sup>34</sup>

Even Brazil’s behavior and its relationship with Cuba worried the U.S. State Department. In another article published by *The Nation* in March 1976, the magazine discussed Brazil’s recognition of the Cuban and Soviet backed MPLA—the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola—as the effective government of the African country in the previous year.<sup>35</sup> *The Nation* stated that President Ford’s foreign policy towards that country was weakening U.S. influence in Brasilia. “The capering friendliness displayed by Secretary of State Kissinger during his late February visit with the despotic ruler of Brazil may have seemed excessive to Americans who have not followed closely recent Brazilian moves on the stage of world affairs”, the publication highlighted.<sup>36</sup> “The fact is that Latin America’s largest, most populous and richest country, whose loyal cooperation Washington has long taken for granted, has shown a disconcerting willingness to follow an independent, if antagonistic, course.”<sup>37</sup> The same article mentioned a study by Stanford University and the American Enterprise for Public Policy Research that urged the United States, Japan, and Western Europe to “integrate Brazil into the developed neo-capitalist Atlantic community.”<sup>38</sup> According to the study, future Brazilian administrations might decide that the “dubious value of Third World leadership is worth more than a junior partnership in the

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

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Farnsworth and Nancy Stein, “Brazil Leaves Out Orbit,” *The Nation*, March 13, 1976, 294.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

Euro-American club.”<sup>39</sup> The magazine wrapped up the article by stating that “Brazil’s Angola policy is a step in this direction.”<sup>40</sup> Beyond the support to MPLA, the publication added that the Brazilian government voted with the Arabs in the United Nations to condemn Zionism as a form of racism, and it signed a US\$ 4 billion nuclear power deal with West Germany, which eventually gave Brazilian military regime a nuclear capability.<sup>41</sup>

In raising the Brazilian nuclear issue, *The Nation* touched a sensitive issue concerning the Brazilian diplomatic strategy that became a priority after the 1964 military coup d’état in the face of the energy needs of the national development project and the potential exhaustion of water resources.<sup>42</sup> Both Presidents Castelo Branco (1964-1967) and Costa e Silva (1967-1969) brought this issue to their agendas.<sup>43</sup> The following head of state, President Emílio Médici (1964-1979), pushed the issue to the fore through the creation of Nuclebrás, mapping out a plan which took into account future energy needs and planning for the construction of hydroelectric plants.<sup>44</sup> Then, President Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979) viewed the acquisition of nuclear technology as an important symbol of Brazil’s growing global profile and argued that in order to meet the country’s rising energy demand Brazil needed nuclear power.<sup>45</sup>

The Brazilianist and historian Thomas Skidmore explains that “although the United States admitted Brazil’s need for increased energy capacity, Washington countered that the ability to generate nuclear power would allow the military regime to produce nuclear weapons, which the United States could not permit.”<sup>46</sup> Despite the fact that Brazil received reactors from

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Sidnei Munhoz and Francisco Silva, *Brazil-United States relations: XX and XXI centuries* (Maringá: Eduem, 2013), 205.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Skidmore, <https://library.brown.edu/create/fivecenturiesofchange/chapters/chapter-7/military-rule/geisel/>.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

Westinghouse Electric Corporation in 1974, an American manufacturing company, the USA Commission for Atomic Energy vetoed the supply of fuel—an action that was in line with the new non-proliferation posture of the American government.<sup>47</sup> The Brazilian scholars Sidnei Munhoz and Francisco Silva underscore that it was within this scenario that the Brazil-Germany Agreement came about, as the European country was also seeking to increase its autonomy from the USA (guaranteeing access to uranium mines and providing new markets for German products).<sup>48</sup> “During the Ford-Kissinger administration, pressure was exerted in a very careful and cordial way. Washington still saw Brazil as a necessary and preferential ally in Latin America”, the authors state. As they discuss the U.S. Secretary of State’s trip to Brasília in February 1976 and the fact that both countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding on that occasion which established bilateral consultative meetings across a range of issues, Munoz and Silva write that this diplomatic initiative “had much more symbolic significance than actually providing any concrete results” relating to the attempt to contain the Brazilian nuclear development.<sup>49</sup> The diplomatic tension, therefore, was up in the air. The dissatisfaction with the decisions of the Brazilian government came from conservative and liberal voters—an avenue of electoral opportunities for Carter’s candidacy.

### **2.3 The Brazilian Political Landscape**

The historian David Schmitz provides a sophisticated reading of the U.S. support for the Latin American dictatorships of the 1960s, most of which had started under good relations with Washington, including the Brazilian one (established in 1964). “In order to protect American

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<sup>47</sup> Munhoz and Silva, 205.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

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



investments and prevent any further political deterioration, it was imperative that order be maintained and the support for military governments remained central to American policy,” he writes in his book *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships*.<sup>50</sup> The scholar also mentions a Memorandum by the U.S. Department of State prepared in December 1970 concerning the American approach towards Brasília. The document pointed out that, while the government of General Castello Branco (1964-1967)—the first head of state of the Brazilian military regime—was criticized by Congress and the American press due to its “repressive aspects,”<sup>51</sup> the idea of supporting authoritarian regimes was nonetheless “warranted”<sup>52</sup> since “Brazil was stable, provided a safe environment for investments and trade, and was actively working against communism in South America.”<sup>53</sup>

However, throughout the 1970s, some aspects of Brazil’s international policy, its nuclear strategy—as discussed previously—and the economic and political decline of its dictatorship pushed Washington to rethink its relationship with Brazil. An article by *The New York Times* in September 1976 registered that—“two years after soaring petroleum prices and the world recession brought Brazil’s ‘economic miracle’ to an end”—the country was moving toward a new model of development.<sup>54</sup> The newspaper stated that the emerging patterns included a greater role for the state in the economy, a new emphasis on Brazilian-made products to replace imports, and a slower rate of growth during the next few years.<sup>55</sup> It also added that the military government’s shift in the economy has “provoked intense criticism from businessmen, who have

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<sup>50</sup> David F. Schmitz, *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1965-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 93.

<sup>51</sup> “U.S. Policy toward Latin America”, 8 September 1971, NSSM 108, NSC, Box 11, RG 273, quoted in David F. Schmitz, *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1965-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 93.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Schmitz, 93.

<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Kandell, “Brazil Moves Toward State Capitalism,” *New York Times*, September 12, 1976, 119.

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

been the strongest civilian supporters of the revolution declared by the armed forces” in 1964.<sup>56</sup> Together with the economic issue, the continuation of repression against political activists encouraged civil society to remobilize. During President Ernesto Geisel’s administration (1974-1979), influential civil organizations such as the Brazilian Legal Association and the Brazilian Press Association joined church leaders, student groups, and union organizers in demanding democratic reforms.<sup>57</sup> Skidmore highlights that, “faced with such a diverse, widespread, and committed opposition, Geisel needed to embrace the inevitability of liberalization, revert to the high levels of repression that characterized (Emílio) Médici presidency (1969-1974), or risk losing control of the democratization process.”<sup>58</sup>

When he took office in March 1974, President Geisel had stated that his administration would make efforts to promote a “gradual democratic improvement” with the “greater general participation of the responsible elites and the people.”<sup>59</sup> Eight months after this presidential speech, the military regime promoted the most open elections since 1965 but was shocked by the outcome. Senate candidates from the opposition were allowed to campaign on television and radio. “Granted the opportunity to disseminate a party platform, opposition candidates wisely transformed the election into a symbolic plebiscite about the military rule,” Skidmore describes.<sup>60</sup> “On election day, most military endorsed candidates lost, and Geisel was reminded of his disdain for the Brazilian public’s voting tendencies.”<sup>61</sup> As the President realized he would have difficulties maintaining power under his liberalization plan, his government reversed the

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Skidmore, <https://library.brown.edu/create/fivecenturiesofchange/chapters/chapter-7/military-rule/geisel/>.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Ernesto Geisel, “19 de março de 1974 - Pronunciamento feito na primeira reunião ministerial,” *Biblioteca Presidência da República*, <http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/presidencia/ex-presidentes/ernesto-geisel/discursos/1974/03.pdf/view>, (March 19, 1974). Accessed January 12, 2021.

<sup>60</sup> Skidmore, <https://library.brown.edu/create/fivecenturiesofchange/chapters/chapter-7/military-rule/geisel/>.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

initiatives that were established before the general elections. Geisel closed the National Congress and issued a bill (Lei Falcão) that ended opposition candidates' right to campaign and broadcast over radio.<sup>62</sup>

Beyond that, the continuity of the prosecution against pro-democracy activists mobilized, even more, the forces that opposed the military government.<sup>63</sup> The most representative landmark was the death of Vladimir Herzog—the director of journalism of TV Cultura, the state of São Paulo's public television station—that happened one year before. In October 1975, he voluntarily presented himself for questioning about his alleged links to the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) at the Department of Information Operations—Center for Internal Defense Operations (DOI-CODI), the Brazilian intelligence and political repression agency.<sup>64</sup> Twelve hours after his arrival to the building, the police announced he had hanged himself with a piece of cloth from the window bars of the police cell where he had been detained.<sup>65</sup> “No one who knew Vladimir thought he had killed himself”, James Green writes in his book, *We Cannot Remain Silent: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States*.<sup>66</sup>

As a consequence of the journalist's death, “a rejuvenated student movement headed by a new generation of activists led 30,000 university students and professors in a weeklong strike,” Green explains.<sup>67</sup> He adds that the journalists' union remained in permanent session in protest against the military's measures, and forty-two bishops signed a statement against the state's violence, events that Green calls “a turning point in unifying opposition to the military regime.”<sup>68</sup>

As a consequence of the empowerment of the groups against the government, the main

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<sup>62</sup> L6339, [http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/leis/1970-1979/l6339.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/1970-1979/l6339.htm).

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

<sup>64</sup> Green, 332.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

opposition party (MDB—the Brazilian Democratic Movement) won control of municipal councils in the country’s largest cities in the November 1976 elections.<sup>69</sup> The democratic siege of the dictatorship was continually increasing.

#### **2.4 Jimmy Carter: Governor, Candidate and President**

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and former President Jimmy Carter are the only two citizens of the state of Georgia to have won the Nobel Peace Prize. While the Democrat’s political career was taking off, the Baptist preacher had a national and international audience for his speeches and sermons. However, Carter never appeared in public together with Dr. King.<sup>70</sup> As explained by Robert Strong, a specialist in the history of Georgia, a photograph of a politician in the 1960s standing next to the Civil Rights leader would have made a statement about where that politician stood on issues that were highly controversial in electoral behavior.<sup>71</sup> “Carter avoided such statements until after he was elected Governor,” Strong argues. “He came to play his public part in the cause of civil rights on his own terms and on his own timetable.”<sup>72</sup> In addition, the scholar explains that the Democrat ran as a moderate and was particularly careful on race-sensitive matters during his gubernatorial campaign in 1970.<sup>73</sup> As a candidate, he promised to invite George Wallace, the Governor of Alabama and the infamous opponent of efforts to allow black students to attend the state university, to visit Georgia.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 332.

<sup>70</sup> Robert Strong, “Politics and Principle: Jimmy Carter in the Civil Rights Era,” *IJAS Online*, no. 3 (2014), 14. Accessed January 10, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26556709>.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

After his election as governor, Carter visited Brazil in 1972 and met with the third president of the military regime, General Emílio Médici. On that occasion, the Brazilian newspaper *O Globo* observed that Carter stated that “Brazil was becoming more and more a brother of the continent.”<sup>75</sup> The Governor also told the press that he had given Médici a picture by a Georgian painter that shows a growing tree, “to symbolize the growth of Brazil,”<sup>76</sup> and that he requested the opening of a Brazilian consulate in Georgia. No word of criticism against the dictatorship was shared publicly during the gubernatorial trip.<sup>77</sup>

As the Democratic candidate for President of the United States in 1976, Jimmy Carter mentioned Brazil once during the three presidential debates with his Republican opponent. He addressed the nuclear issue and the Brazilian agreement with West Germany. Carter said that the U.S. government should stop the sale (that was conducted by Bonn) of “processing plants for Brazil.”<sup>78</sup> He continued by saying that, “if we continue under Mr. Ford’s policy, by 1985 or ‘90 we’ll have twenty nations that have the capability of exploding atomic weapons. This has got to be stopped.”<sup>79</sup> In its coverage of the debate, *The New York Times* pointed out that the subject was brought to the conversation by the Democrat, and he charged that President Ford “had only recently become concerned about the problem.”<sup>80</sup> The same newspaper stated that—in an address to the San Diego City Club in September—Carter promised that he would call on all nations to accept a “voluntary moratorium”<sup>81</sup> on the sale or purchase of nuclear fuel enrichment or reprocessing plants. The candidate said that such a moratorium “should apply retroactively”<sup>82</sup> to

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<sup>75</sup> *O Globo*, “A discreta passagem por Brasília em 72,” November 4, 1976, 2.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> The Commission on Presidential Debates, “October 6, 1976 Debate Transcript,”

<https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/october-6-1976-debate-transcript/>, (October, 1976).

Accessed January 30, 2021.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *New York Times*, “U.S. Dilemma: World Energy Need Encourages Spread of Atomic Arms,” October 11, 1976, 57.

<sup>81</sup> *New York Times*, “Carter vows a curb on nuclear exports to bar arms spread,” September 26, 1976, 1.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

agreements already made by West Germany to sell such facilities to Brazil and France and to supply Pakistan with such technology.

Right after the end of the presidential campaign, the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* interviewed members of Brazil's diplomatic body who admitted—anononymously—that the Democrat's administration would promote “verbal skirmishes” between the White House and the military regime.<sup>83</sup> In a conversation with Brazilian journalists, the spokesperson of the U.S. Embassy in Brasília minimized the impact of the President-Elect's interview to *Playboy* magazine that was published in November, the election month.<sup>84</sup> Carter said that Brazil did not have a democratic government but a military dictatorship that was “highly repressive toward political prisoners.”<sup>85</sup> The American diplomat emphasized that those statements were delivered by a candidate and not a President. The spokesman also mentioned that, actually, the Democrat was just criticizing the foreign-policy developed by Ford's Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger.

The Brazilian press and opinion-makers received Carter's critiques of human rights violations with skepticism. Experts in global commerce that were interviewed by *O Globo* said that the remarks of the future President represented “a political strategy to please part of the American voters.”<sup>86</sup> Beyond that, in an editorial article, *Folha de S. Paulo* stated that Carter's liberalizing pressure was “not motivated by democratic principles, but by the fear of the emergence of regimes such as General Velasco Alvarado's (Peru's former left-wing military president) in crucial countries to the American global strategy.”<sup>87</sup> It is not a coincidence that the Peruvian government was mentioned since President Geisel was scheduled to meet with the President of Peru and Velasco Alvarado's successor, Morales Bermúdez, in November to discuss

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<sup>83</sup> *Folha de S. Paulo*, “Itamarati admite só escaramuças,” November 4, 1976, 7.

<sup>84</sup> *Folha de S. Paulo*, “Embaixada não crê em sérias mudanças,” November 4, 1976, 7.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *O Globo*, “Vitória de Carter não preocupa,” November 4, 1976, 3. The point still holds despite the self-censorship inherent in the press under a military dictatorship.

<sup>87</sup> *Folha de S. Paulo*, “Brasília: Opinião,” November 4, 1976, 2.

and implement strategies to increase the bilateral commerce between both nations.<sup>88</sup> Even with the fact that Morales was considered less radical and dogmatic than his predecessor by U.S. diplomats,<sup>89</sup> the eyes of Washington were still in Lima since *Granma*, the official Cuban newspaper, said that “the designation of General Morales Bermudez might mean the consolidation of the progressive advances of the Peruvian revolutionary process.”<sup>90</sup> According to the Brazilian media, therefore, Carter’s concern about human rights and nuclear proliferation had the goal of satisfying the American economic interests and the will of keeping its influence in the region—since the Brazilian military regime was suffering from its own economic and political decline and was facing a growing and organized opposition. No wonder Geisel said again to the press that his government was committed to the improvement of Brazilian democracy on the same day that Jimmy Carter became the President-Elect of the United States. “(This commitment must) start with the participation of the people in the political framework,”<sup>91</sup> Geisel said. It was an indication that his administration would proceed with its liberalization plans—plans that would culminate with the return of the civilians to the government in the following decade.

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<sup>88</sup> *O Globo*, “A curto prazo Peru e Brasil pretendem triplicar comércio,” November 4, 1976, 3.

<sup>89</sup> Office of the Historian: United States Department of State, “Telegram 10217 from the Embassy in Peru to the Department of State,” <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve11p2/d326>, (November 9, 1976). Accessed January 30, 2021.

<sup>90</sup> *New York Times*, “The United States and Cuba Both Welcome Him,” September 21, 1975, 2.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3 THE NEW PRESIDENT AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH BRASÍLIA

#### 3.1 Summary

This chapter approaches the first two years of Jimmy Carter's presidency and the relationship of his government with Brazil. A close reading of the sources reveals that the White House took a pragmatic approach to Brazil, and that Carter's foreign policy was ultimately shaped by a confluence of different interest groups and agendas. Ultimately, this mix of constituencies forced the American government to give up its pro-human rights discourse in order to stay connected with its Brazilian interlocutors in the regime as well as in the opposition. One important pressure group was U.S. capital; American multinationals were concerned about the way the military regime was conducting the economy, and U.S. bankers held \$12 billion of Brazilian debt.<sup>92</sup> Essential and attractive industries (such as oil and energy) were in the hands of the Brazilian government, and multinationals and bankers alike pressured Carter to maintain stable relations with Brazil. Those relations—already strained by pro-human rights actions on the part of the U.S. Congress—were further threatened when, without prior consultation with President Geisel, Carter sent Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to West Germany to negotiate the end of the nuclear agreement with Brazil, an ultimately unsuccessful act that both the Brazilian regime and its opponents saw as a violation of national sovereignty. The regime was further irritated by the First Lady's visit to Brasília in 1978 due to the way Mrs. Carter interacted with opposition leaders. The South American country reacted by canceling a military agreement with D.C. which was signed in 1952. Thus, a complex set of political and economic interests pressured President Carter to shore up D.C.'s relationship with the Latin American nation by

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<sup>92</sup> Tad Szulc. "Recompression in Brazil," *The New Republic*, May 7, 1977, 15.



softening his stances on both the nuclear issue and on human rights. The presidential visit to Brasilia in 1978 demonstrates that the White House accepted such a pragmatic approach, since there were no attacks against the Brazilian government on either of these critical issues.

### 3.2 Carter Takes Office

In the months before Jimmy Carter's inauguration, U.S. legislators added the Harkin amendment to the 1976 foreign aid bill. The decision gave Congress the power to limit U.S. economic assistance to "any country which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights."<sup>93</sup> The amendment also required the State Department to prepare a report about the state of human rights in all countries receiving military aid from the American government. The revelations about Brasília created undesirable publicity for the military regime. Skidmore explains that, rather than answering the State Department, President Geisel "relied on nationalist sentiment in Brazil, portrayed the report as an incursion on Brazilian sovereignty, and rejected further military aid from the United States."<sup>94</sup> With the new President in the Oval Office, the White House increased diplomatic pressure on the Brazilian regime. In January 1977, Carter sent Vice President Walter Mondale to Bonn to persuade West Germany to cancel the 1975 nuclear agreement with Brazil—a mission that ended unsuccessfully.<sup>95</sup> Brasília was angered by the American policy of ignoring Brazil and talking directly to the West Germans.<sup>96</sup> As a response, two months after the vice presidential trip, Geisel decided to cancel a

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<sup>93</sup> Office of the Historian: United States Department of State, "Telegram 227379 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Argentina," <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve11p2/d53>, (September 15, 1976). Accessed January 30, 2021.

<sup>94</sup> Skidmore, <https://library.brown.edu/create/fivecenturiesofchange/chapters/chapter-7/military-rule/geisel/>.

<sup>95</sup> Andrew James Hurrell, *The Quest for Autonomy: The Evolution of Brazil's Role in the International System, 1964-1985* (Brasília: Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão, 2013), 278.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

Brazilian military agreement with D.C., which had been signed in 1952. At that point, as it will be explored later in this chapter, even the most progressive politicians and pro-human rights sectors in Brazil started to support the discourse of the military government around the country's sovereignty against American interference.<sup>97</sup>

In the first months of his administration, President Carter's speeches also contributed to amplifying the tension between the United States and military dictatorships in LATAM. In April, as he addressed Latin American diplomats at the Organization of American States (OAS), the President made a strong defense of his emphasis on human rights on foreign affairs and asked the region to halt the spread of nuclear facilities that could be used to produce weapons.<sup>98</sup> In a commencement ceremony in the following month at the University of Notre Dame, Carter received an honorary degree together with three pro-human rights Catholic activists, Cardinal Kim Sou-hwan (South Korea), Bishop Donal Lamont (Rhodesia), and Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns (Brazil). The last one was a relentless opponent of the Brazilian dictatorship and its use of torture. "In their fights for human freedoms in Rhodesia, Brazil, and South Korea, these three religious leaders typify all that is best in our countries and in our church," the U.S. head of state said.<sup>99</sup> Although this kind of discourse helped to elect the Democratic candidate and pleased conservatives and liberals, the extent of this rhetoric and President Geisel's potentially adverse reactions worried the American sectors that had economic interests in Brazil. Public commentary on the Brazilian economy showed a mix of praise and concern. For example, a piece in *The New*

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<sup>97</sup> Luiz Felipe de Seixas Corrêa, *O pragmatismo responsável na visão da diplomacia e da academia*, (Brasília: Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão, 2018), 91-93.

<sup>98</sup> *New York Times*, "Text of Carter's Address to O.A.S Council Outlining Policy Toward Latin America," April 15, 1977, 10.

<sup>99</sup> Jimmy Carter, "Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame," *The American Presidency Project*, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-commencement-exercises-the-university-notre-dame>, (May 22, 2017) quoted in Mary E. Stuckey, *Jimmy Carter, Human Rights, and the National Agenda* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 51.

*Republic* highlighted that Brazil's Gross National Product (GNP) was expected to grow by nine percent in 1977.<sup>100</sup> However, it cautioned that "almost everybody seems to be tired of the way the economy is run in Brazil," adding that "Brazil's external debt now stands at \$27 billion, the highest in the world. This does not seem to bother either the government, which is prepared to see it go up to \$40 billion by 1980, or the American bankers who hold \$12 billion of the debt."<sup>101</sup>

American companies were also concerned about the way Brasília was taking control of essential and attractive national industries. "State enterprises (are) running everything from the national power supply—Electrobras—to much of the steel industry (Vale do Rio Doce). This is state capitalism at its extreme in a country that professes its allegiance to free enterprise," *The New Republic* reported. The conservative magazine *National Review* wrote that President Carter's statements generated a "flurry of irritated reactions abroad" and caused "Brazil, the most powerful nation in Latin America, to cancel its 25-year mutual defense treaty with the U.S.."<sup>102</sup> The pressure towards the American President to review the relationship with Brasília came not only from the private sector but also from the White House staff. The National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, warned President Carter that the human rights initiative, combined with the administration's interest in the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons, could produce a backlash in some Latin American countries, prompting a coalition of Latin American countries against the White House.<sup>103</sup> Brzezinski cautioned the President that the White House risked "having bad relations simultaneously with Brazil, Chile, and Argentina because of the way (the country) was implementing our human-rights policy."<sup>104</sup> The *National Review* pointed out that there was a

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<sup>100</sup> Szulc, 15.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>102</sup> *National Review*, "Carter at Sea," April 1, 1977, 1-2.

<sup>103</sup> Victor S. Kaufman, "The Bureau of Human Rights during the Carter Administration," *The Historian*, vol.61, no. 1 (1998), 51. Accessed February 3, 2021: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24450063>.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

particular concern with U.S.-Brazil relations because of their “strategic importance to the United States.”<sup>105</sup> In that scenario, though, when President Carter tried to establish a platform of dialogue between the two nations, his administration's policies ended up promoting more tension. By the time that D.C. set up the First Lady's trip to Brazil in order to meet President Geisel and local official representatives, the U.S. President signed the treaty establishing Latin America as the world's first nuclear-weapons-free zone four days before her trip in June 1977 and signed the American Convention on Human Rights—a measure that Brazil resented as another interference in its domestic affairs.<sup>106</sup>

### 3.3 The First Lady's Visit and its Impact on U.S-Brazil Relations

Thomas Skidmore characterizes Rosalynn Carter's visit to Brazil as “an attempt at reconciliation<sup>107</sup>.” According to the First Lady's own words, her mission was “to try to ease the tension between our countries by explaining Carter's policies on human rights, nuclear non-proliferation, and the arms race<sup>108</sup>.” However, the ambiguous decisions of D.C. around the trip—as the American administration tried both to please the government and to establish connections with the local opposition—gave room for more tension and disagreement. First of all, the White House informed the press that Rosalynn Carter, in a phone call with President Carter prior to her arrival in Brazil, said that specific stop “would be one of the hardest ones in her trip to Latin America<sup>109</sup> (which also included Jamaica, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, and Venezuela)” as she approached the tension between both countries regarding issues such as

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Kathy B. Smith, “The First Lady Represents America: Rosalynn Carter in South America,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (1997): 540. Accessed February 3, 2021: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27551767>.

<sup>107</sup> Skidmore, <https://library.brown.edu/create/fivecenturiesofchange/chapters/chapter-7/military-rule/geisel/>.

<sup>108</sup> Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 204.

<sup>109</sup> *Folha de S. Paulo*, “Antes, a previsão de etapa difícil,” June 8, 1977, 8.

the Brazilian nuclear agreement with West Germany.<sup>110</sup> Beyond that, the U.S. Embassy in Brasília announced that it would not block any correspondence directed to Mrs. Carter from any opposition group.<sup>111</sup> While Rosalynn Carter's first speech in Brazil said that the United States respected the sovereignty of each country in the hemisphere, she stressed that the American approach to Latin American would be based on "a fundamental and sincere commitment to human rights."<sup>112</sup> Diplomatic circles in Brasília considered as "thought-provoking"<sup>113</sup> the fact that the First Lady invited leaders of the opposition in the Congress to join her for dinner in the residence of the U.S. Ambassador John Crimmins. According to the official protocol, as explained by the Brazilian newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo*, Mrs. Carter could only invite the Presidents of both legislative houses (the Chamber of Deputies and the Federal Senate). In this case, the event would have representatives from the regime's official party, the National Renewal Alliance (ARENA), exclusively.<sup>114</sup> However, Rosalynn Carter invited opposition members to the reception.

On the following day, events between President Ernesto Geisel and the American First Lady included an exchange of gifts, a dinner at the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the presentation of a sympathy card due to the death of the President's sister-in-law, Alzira Geisel.<sup>115</sup> In a press conference in Brasília, Mrs. Carter confirmed that she addressed topics such as the nuclear issue ("a pretty difficult subject"<sup>116</sup>) and human rights ("each country has a different approach to that") in her conversation with Brazilian officials. However, the First Lady's statements to the local media avoided any direct criticism against the local government.

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Folha de S. Paulo*, "Carter não virá em 77," June 7, 1977, 7.

<sup>112</sup> *O Globo*, "Rosalynn encontra-se duas vezes com Geisel, hoje," June 7, 1977, 3.

<sup>113</sup> *O Estado de S. Paulo*, "Crise estudantil, assunto do 1o dia," June 7, 1977, 19.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *O Estado de S. Paulo*, "Carta, presentes, pêsame a Geisel," June 8, 1977, 14.

<sup>116</sup> *O Globo*, "Rosalynn considera bom o diálogo com Geisel," June 8, 1977, 6.

Moreover, on that occasion, she was asked about anti-American sentiments in the region. A journalist told her that the White House's pro-human rights agenda was considered “by many in the Third World to be an excuse for economic domination of poor nations by rich countries<sup>117</sup>.” Her response emphasized that the “issue of human rights encompasses economic development<sup>118</sup>.” Another questioner stressed that there were “many people here in Latin American who think that Carter’s government<sup>119</sup>” was “practicing a very selective morality on human rights, being concerned about violations in Chile, Argentina and Uruguay, but without saying a word about Marxist countries like Cambodia, Vietnam and Cuba<sup>120</sup>.” Rosalynn Carter answered that decisions around this matter should be taken according to local realities.

Before traveling from Brasília to Recife for private appointments in the Northeastern city, the First Lady received letters from activists such as the President of Women’s Movement Pro-Amnesty, Teresinha Godoy Zerbini, who asked her to share with America the fight of Brazilian women for human rights.<sup>121</sup> Another message that was delivered to Rosalynn Carter came from family members of political prisoners. The report contained the names of 129 people detained and convicted for political reasons, who were in jail or missing.<sup>122</sup> *O Estado de S. Paulo* wrote that Brazilian authorities breathed with relief as soon as the First Lady left Brasília.<sup>123</sup> Despite the apparent calm in the interaction with officials, Mrs. Carter’s stay was considered to be full of “embarrassing incidents<sup>124</sup>.” The same newspaper stated that the human rights agenda interested her more than the First Lady’s scheduled conversations. Even President Carter’s

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *O Estado de S. Paulo*, “Incidente Assusta a Visitante,” June 8, 1977, 14.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *O Estado de S. Paulo*, “Após a partida, o alívio em Brasília,” June 9, 1977, 16.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

expected invitation for President Geisel to visit the United States was not brought by his wife—as confirmed by the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Azeredo da Silveira.<sup>125</sup>

In Recife, Rosalynn Carter broke with her itinerary and invited Thomas Capuano and the Reverend Lawrence Rosebaugh, two American missionaries working with the city’s urban poor, to the U.S. Consulate.<sup>126</sup> The local police had arrested the religious workers and beaten them up while in jail. Regarding this episode, the historian James Green explains that the photos of the First Lady talking to the man was a signal to the Brazilian government and the opposition that the Carter administration was serious about its human rights initiatives.<sup>127</sup> “I have listened to their experiences, and I sympathize with them,”<sup>128</sup> Mrs. Carter said according to *The New York Times* after the 15-minute meeting at the American Consulate. “I have a personal message to take back to Jimmy,” she concluded.<sup>129</sup> When the Brazilian Foreign Minister was asked about the incident and the letters received by President Carter’s wife, Azeredo da Silveira provoked D.C. by remembering the death of two men by the police during a Puerto Rican demonstration in Chicago in the previous week.<sup>130</sup> “(Connecting the Brazilian government to the episode in Recife and the situations reported by the letters) would be like saying that the American people and government are responsible for the incidents in Chicago. We must consider this as an internal matter of the United States”, Silveira stated.<sup>131</sup>

### 3.4 President Carter’s Visit in 1978

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Green, 337.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *New York Times*, “Mrs. Carter Told by 2 Americans of Brazil Ordeal,” June 9, 1977, 1.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> David Vidal, “Ambassador Rosalynn Carter,” *New York Times*, June 14, 1977, 18.

<sup>131</sup> *Folha de S. Paulo*, “Foi uma ‘visita de informação’, segundo Azevedo,” June 9, 1977, 8.

The impact of the First Lady's visit to Brazil affected the way that the Department of State later negotiated the relationship with the South American country. President Carter's planners came to the conclusion that gratuitous provocations should be minimized or avoided.<sup>132</sup> As a result of this new strategy, a presidential visit to Brazil in 1978 was designed to soften conflicts with the government. Rosalynn Carter's schedule did not include any events with high-level representatives and the press, for example.<sup>133</sup> *The New York Times* defined the presidential trip as an American gesture of conciliation with Brasília<sup>134</sup> since the political landscape in Latin America was not favorable to D.C. in 1978. Brazilian Foreign Minister Antonio Francisco Azeredo da Silveira had said on television and in newspapers that Carter had invited himself to visit Brazil and the preparations for the arrival of the American head of state were a matter of duty rather than a wish.<sup>135</sup> Beyond that, President Geisel told CBS that the pro-human rights policy was "fair, reasonable, necessary,<sup>136</sup>" but the Brazilian government would not accept any interference.<sup>137</sup>

Despite the promises on his inauguration regarding an effort to promote democracy, President Geisel had strengthened the power of the regime against the opposition as a reaction to the results of the congressional elections in 1974. Four years later, the 21 state governors were chosen by state electoral colleges where ARENA—Geisel's party—had the control. One-third of the Federal Senate was picked by the same colleges, assuring that the majority were from the regime's official party.<sup>138</sup> Describing this scenario, *The New Republic* defined Brazil as "a

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<sup>132</sup> John Osborne, "White House Watch: Travel Notes," *The New Republic*, April 15, 1978, 6.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> David Vidal, "Carter Discusses Rights With 6 Prominent Brazilians," *New York Times*, April 1, 1978.

<sup>135</sup> John Osborne, "At Work Abroad," *The New Republic*, April 4, 1978, 11.

<sup>136</sup> *O Estado de S. Paulo*, "Geisel sugere compreensão," March 30, 1978, 1.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Tas Szulc. "Recompression in Brazil." *The New Republic*, May 7, 1977, 19.



one-party state<sup>139</sup>.” The Brazilian return to democracy—which seemed to be close during the U.S. presidential elections—would not happen so fast, and the White House needed to reestablish its partnership with the current government.

Even the relationship with the opposition had to be reshaped, since this group was uncomfortable with the idea of any American attempt to interfere in local politics. Congressman Tancredo Neves, who would become the first civilian to be elected President of Brazil after the end of the dictatorship in 1985, condemned any prospective interference by President Carter in his upcoming visit to Brasília. “Since we practice the principle of self-determination, we want to be respected,” the politician stated.<sup>140</sup> Other oppositionists interviewed by *Folha de S. Paulo* criticized the U.S. pro-human rights policy by saying that the American President represented a country that made the very weapons used to kill people and violate human rights.<sup>141</sup> Even the Brazilian press had its issues with the White House. Upon Carter's arrival in Brasília in March 1978, *O Estado de S. Paulo* published an article by its correspondent in D.C., Ruy Castro, in which the author criticized the way that the White House was treating international journalists. “An exclusive interview with the inaccessible U.S. National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, would be only given if the White House was allowed to censor the material. *O Estado de S. Paulo* gave up the interview,” Castro stated.<sup>142</sup> “[This episode shows] the respect that President Jimmy Carter's xenophobic advisors have for representatives of the foreign press. Since he took office, the U.S. President answered questions from foreign journalists during his press conferences on two occasions only,” he added.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *O Estado de S. Paulo*, “Congresso evitará temas controversos,” March 29, 1978, 7.

<sup>141</sup> *Folha de S. Paulo*, “Câmara discute o sentido da visita,” March 29, 1978, 9.

<sup>142</sup> Ruy Barbosa, “Um segredo incompreensível,” *O Estado de S. Paulo*, March 28, 1978, 6.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

Among young activists, there was also skepticism regarding the pro-human rights policy. By the time Carter was traveling to Brazil, around 300 students from the University of Brasília had approved a motion against the presidential visit and accused the Democrat of being the “most notable representative of the imperialism that killed, through murderous dictatorships, not only in Brazil, but in several other countries in the Third World.”<sup>144</sup> The event was filmed by American television stations such as NBC, ABC, and CBS and reported by *Time Magazine* and the Associated Press.<sup>145</sup>

The President, therefore, needed to manage the anger of both those in power and pro-democracy groups in Brazil. The White House could not irritate the military regime in the same way that the First Lady’s visit did in the previous year. The pro-human rights discourse had closed doors, and the American government was at risk of losing its connections in the wealthiest country in the region. As highlighted by James Green, the State Department’s moves around Brazil issued a message that President Carter took the country’s emergent role as an international power seriously.<sup>146</sup> On the other hand, the U.S. government was aware of the importance of pleasing the opposition since their success would benefit the United States. “A democratic Brazil, with free elections, is interesting to Washington D.C.,” *O Estado de S. Paulo* stated.<sup>147</sup> The newspaper stressed that the Brazilian political opening would be convenient for American companies with businesses in the country. While authoritarian regimes tend to “adopt nationalist policies,”<sup>148</sup> the implementation of liberal democracy would “guarantee the stability of foreign investments.”<sup>149</sup> “It is clear”, the publication concluded, “that such a scenario (a democratic

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<sup>144</sup> *O Estado de S. Paulo*, “Estudantes de Brasília condenam a visita,” March 29, 1978, 7.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> Green, 347.

<sup>147</sup> *O Estado de S. Paulo*, “Expectativa é favorável em São Paulo,” March 29, 1978, 8.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

Brazil) is interesting to the Democratic Party and Jimmy Carter much more due to economic reasons than the (success of the) Brazilian destiny.”<sup>150</sup>

The pragmatism of the American government could be seen before the President’s arrival in Brazil. Foreign Minister Azeredo da Silva announced that Carter had requested a meeting with the chief of the National Information Service (SNI) and the regime’s official presidential candidate, General João Baptista Figueiredo—something that was confirmed by the U.S. Embassy in Brazil.<sup>151</sup> As soon as Air Force One arrived in Brasília, Carter pleased his guests by emphasizing Brazil’s “vision, energy, and creativity of a big power.”<sup>152</sup> Based on this presidential statement, *O Estado de S. Paulo* wrote that it was clear that the United States wanted this new power at its side.<sup>153</sup> At that point, as the newspaper emphasized, the U.S. was aware of the fact that Brazil represented “the eighth largest economy in the world, one of the highest rates of international growth, the fifth largest nation by area, and the sixth-largest one by population.”<sup>154</sup> Even the discussion around the nuclear agreement with West Germany was softened by President Carter. The Democrat told the Brazilian press that the peaceful use of atomic energy “was not incompatible” with the fight to prevent nuclear proliferation.<sup>155</sup>

In his statements, while in Brasília, the American head of state maintained a discreet behavior regarding the debate concerning freedoms and nuclear issues. Carter’s speech in the National Congress mentioned the pro-human rights policy without focusing on issues such as torture or political freedom.<sup>156</sup> While the U.S. President urged the Brazilian representatives to the importance of the “basic rights of the human person” and “the right to criticize the government”,

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> Paulo Francis, “6 ou 7 na lista de Carter,” *Folha de S. Paulo*, March 28, 1978, 1.

<sup>152</sup> Carlos Conde, “Surpresas do primeiro dia facilitam diálogo,” *O Estado de S. Paulo*, March 30, 1978, 9.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *O Estado de S. Paulo*, “Carter: Brasil e EUA usam átomo para paz,” March 30, 1978, 1.

<sup>156</sup> *O Estado de S. Paulo*, “Para Carter, o Brasil nunca foi subestimado,” March 31, 1978, 1.

he also added—right after—“the right to have access to good education, housing, and health care.”<sup>157</sup>

The front page of the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, after the bilateral meeting between President Carter and President Geisel, stated that the American “gave up his pressures” and, because of that, there was a euphoric feeling among officials in Brasília.<sup>158</sup> *The New York Times* reported that the visit ended in a conciliatory climate that had pleasantly surprised the military government and opened the way to an improvement in relations.<sup>159</sup> On that occasion, Foreign Minister Azeredo da Silveira said that both Presidents got to the point of understanding each other's positions and “that can be considered a move forward.”<sup>160</sup> A communiqué issued by both Presidents at the end of the conversation pointed to the “need to minimize the inevitable differences<sup>161</sup>” of increasingly complex relations—a clear gesture of conciliation of the United States as interpreted by analysts interviewed by the *New York Times*.<sup>162</sup> The White House also made sure to establish connections with the opposition, but in a different way considering the First Lady's previous experience in Latin America. The President had a single session with Cardinal Arns, who had received an honorary degree together with Jimmy Carter at Notre Dame University in 1977; Raymundo Faoro, the President of the Brazilian Legal Association; Júlio Mesquita, the publisher of *O Estado de S. Paulo*; José Mindlin, a prominent businessman from the state of São Paulo; and Marcos Vianna, the president of a state-owned bank.<sup>163</sup> James Green explains that this meeting sent a clear message that the White House shared the concerns of many oppositional forces.<sup>164</sup> The conversation with such opposition leaders was not identified on

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<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> David Vidal, “Carter Discusses Rights With 6 Prominent Brazilians,” *New York Times*, April 1, 1978, 6.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Green, 347.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

the President's official schedule to avoid any conflicts with the regime.<sup>165</sup> In order to reestablish the relationship with its Brazilian interlocutors, Carter set his human rights agenda aside.

#### **4. THE IMPACT OF CARTER'S VISIT AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH FIGUEIREDO**

##### **4.1 Summary**

This chapter discusses the immediate impacts of President Jimmy Carter's visit to Brasília in 1978 and his relationship with President João Figueiredo (1979-1985). The new tone of the U.S. government regarding the Brazilian military regime had not been enough to change Geisel's attitude towards the White House. The Brazilian President rejected an official invitation to visit Washington DC. In March 1979, when General João Figueiredo took office as the new head of state, Carter sent his Vice President Walter Mondale to visit Brasília just one week after the inauguration. The American VP did not approach human rights issues in the conversation with President Figueiredo and took the opportunity to indicate that the White House would not demand "automatic alignment"<sup>166</sup> with the U.S. foreign policy. However, the new Brazilian head of state was not engaged with the idea of strengthening his relationship with Carter's administration. In the period after Mondale's visit, the ongoing clashes between Brasília and Washington DC also evolved in dialogue with changing U.S. politics, when Carter lost the 1980 election to Ronald Reagan. Figueiredo did not congratulate the Republican for his victory, and the South American country went ahead with its foreign policy distant from U.S. influence.

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<sup>165</sup> Osborne, 9.

<sup>166</sup> Laura Fonseca, "Com o redimensionamento das divergências," *O Estado de S. Paulo*, March 24, 1979, 5.

## 4.2 After the Presidential Visit

Even with all efforts led by Carter's administration to rebuild the relationship with the Brazilian government, the White House did not have Brasília's reciprocity. Two months after the U.S. President's visit, President Geisel turned down an official invitation to visit Washington DC.<sup>167</sup> The official explanation delivered to the press by Foreign Minister Azeredo da Silveira was "lack of time."<sup>168</sup> At this point, the ongoing tension in the bilateral relationship with Brazil continued to be criticized by sectors of the American press as well as in the political and the economic arenas. In reporting on "the steel sheds of a huge plant that makes reactor components" in the city of Itaguaí (located in the state of Rio de Janeiro and built through the Brazilian nuclear partnership with West Germany), *The New York Times'* journalist, Juan de Onis, described it as a symbol of the "failure" of Carter's presidency nuclear-technology strategy in South America.<sup>169</sup>

Economic issues continued to influence the tenor of international relations. U.S. bankers were in for at least \$13.4 billion, according to the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, making Brazil their biggest debtor in the Third World.<sup>170</sup> Moreover, American multinational corporations had invested \$6 billion in Brazil, the largest U.S. foreign investment after those of Canada, Great Britain, West Germany, and France.<sup>171</sup> Penny Lernoux, an author and investigative reporter who specialized in Central and South American affairs, summarized this landscape by writing that U.S. banks had no choice but to support Brazil's military regime.<sup>172</sup> In an editorial

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<sup>167</sup> *New York Times*, "Brazilian Declines Carter Invitation," May, 1978, 14.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> Juan de Onis, "Brazil Pushes Nuclear Effort in Spite of U.S.; Contract for Argentine Reactor," *New York Times*, August 12, 1989, 10.

<sup>170</sup> Penny Lernoux, "Brazil Spends Its Way to the Guardhouse," *The Nation*, June 28, 1980, 780.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 781.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

article, *The Nation* stated that “some leaders of these corporations have begun to feel that their interests are now threatened by the arbitrary powers and the statist pretensions of the military government.”<sup>173</sup> The concerns around Brazil’s economy also reverberated in the United States Congress. The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee had shown that the oligopolistic structure of Brazilian industry was the chief cause of inflation in the country.<sup>174</sup> However, as Penny Lernoux wrote in the same progressive magazine, for Brazil’s Ministry of Economy, Delfim Neto, to accept this fact would be to renounce the entire course of development since 1964—the so-called “economic miracle”—in which he had played a large role.<sup>175</sup>

The conservative and progressive press were both uncomfortable with the way the White House was dealing with Brasília, but each group suggested a different approach from the one pursued by President Carter and his staff. *The Nation* stressed that Brazil’s need for democracy was urgent since the maintenance of the military regime would increase “social unrest as more people demand social justice.”<sup>176</sup> According to the publication, Washington DC should offer “sympathetic support”<sup>177</sup> for those standing against the dictatorship. On the other hand, Erik Leddihn, an Austrian conservative political scientist and *National Review*’s writer, stated that Brazil was “not ready for democracy”<sup>178</sup> due to the ideology of some Brazilian opposition groups. Leddihn—as he mentioned the return of Luiz Carlos Prestes, exiled secretary-general of the Brazilian Communist Party, to his country in 1979—remembered a quote by General Milton Tavares de Souza, chief of the São Paulo military district: “Imagine a cobra dying of exposure

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<sup>173</sup> *The Nation*, “Editorials: Brazilian Spring,” July 5, 1980, 2.

<sup>174</sup> Lernoux, 782.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> *The Nation*, “Editorials,” March 31, 1979, 323.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>178</sup> Erick Leddihn, “Brazil and the Pope,,” *National Review*, August 22, 1980, 1010.

during a storm. A passer-by feels sorry for it and puts it under his coat. As soon as it recovers strength, the cobra bites its rescuer and kills him.”<sup>179</sup>

With that proverb, this *National Review*'s writer was calling attention to trends that shaped the final months of Geisel's presidency. Faced with inflation at an 85 percent annual rate<sup>180</sup> and widespread opposition from the business field and the political arena, the Brazilian president needed to embrace liberalization, or risk losing control of the democratization process.<sup>181</sup> Geisel abolished the Institutional Act Number 5f—the regime's most notorious decree that resulted in the institutionalization of the torture—five months before the end of his administration.<sup>182</sup> On the other hand, while *The New Republic* wrote that the White House believed that re-democratization in Brazil would help to stabilize the region, their editorialists also highlighted that repressive laws were still on the books such as the long-standing National Security Law<sup>183</sup>—that allowed the dictatorship to send oppositionists to prison. It was not clear, therefore, when the Presidency would return to the civilians. President Geisel's successor, General João Figueiredo, was already scheduled to take office in March 1979 for a five-year term.

### 4.3 General Figueiredo Takes Office

The former head of the military staff under President Emilio Medici, and the director of the National Intelligence Service, the internal intelligence gathering agency, under Geisel, Figueiredo assumed office on March 15th, 1979.<sup>184</sup> Despite the new President's promises of

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<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> Tad Szulc, “Brazil's Interregnum,” *The New Republic*, July 5, 1980, 18.

<sup>181</sup> Skidmore, <https://library.brown.edu/create/fivecenturiesofchange/chapters/chapter-7/military-rule/geisel/>.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> Szulc, 18.

<sup>184</sup> Green, 356.



liberalization (“It is my unwavering purpose to make this country a democracy”, he said in his first speech as Brazil’s chief of state),<sup>185</sup> political and economic agents were not sure how sincere his desire to pilot the country toward democracy.<sup>186</sup> In the inauguration ceremony, Second Lady Joan Mondale was a last-minute substitute for Vice President Mondale, who could not leave the United States while President Carter was out of Washington DC on his Middle East travels. The switch came as a keen disappointment to the Brazilians,<sup>187</sup> *The New York Times* described, “who are uncommonly sensitive about how they are perceived by the outside world and feel in particular that America does not fully appreciate their size—Brazil is the fifth largest nation in the world—or their importance.”<sup>188</sup> Although the U.S. Embassy provided personal security to Mrs. Mondale, the Second Lady did not receive special treatment by the Brazilian diplomacy and watched the ceremony in the uncomfortable seats in the gallery of the Chamber of Deputies,<sup>189</sup> the Brazilian House of Representatives.

To repair the episode, President Carter sent his Vice President to Brazil to meet with Figueiredo in the following week, an initiative that was appreciated by the new government since it might represent a new American approach to Brasília in which both countries would comprehend and respect each other’s points of view.<sup>190</sup> Upon his arrival, Mondale was warned by local officials not to raise the subjects of human rights or nuclear power in his talks with President Figueiredo.<sup>191</sup> The Vice President praised the South American country by calling Brazil “a nation whose importance has become truly global”<sup>192</sup> and expressed that the bilateral relations

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<sup>185</sup> João Baptista de Oliveira Figueiredo. *Biblioteca da Presidência da República*. “Discurso ao Receber a Faixa Presidencial das Mãos do Presidente Ernesto Geisel” (Brasília: Presidência da República, 1979), 5.

<sup>186</sup> *New York Times*, “New Brazilian Leader, Sworn In, Pledges Democracy,” March 16, 1979, 3.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> *Folha de S. Paulo*, “Boliviano foi esquecido nos cumprimentos,” March 16, 1979, 4.

<sup>190</sup> *Folha de S. Paulo*, “Itamarati confirma vinda de Mondale para quarta-feira,” March 17, 1979, 7.

<sup>191</sup> *New York Times*, “Mondale Arrives in Brazil and is Warned on Talks,” March 22, 1979, 5.

<sup>192</sup> Graham Hovey, “Mondale Sees New Brazil Leaders,” *New York Times*, March 23, 1979, 3.

were “excellent”<sup>193</sup> at that point. Beyond that, Mondale stressed that the relationship between the United States and Latin America had changed and it “had nothing to do with outdated concepts such as automatic alignment”<sup>194</sup>—a statement that aimed to show that DC was willing to respect the region’s independent foreign policies.

Beyond that, the Democrat brought Figueiredo the news regarding the agreement on Brazil’s desire to send former Foreign Minister Azeredo da Silveira to DC as the new Brazilian Ambassador in America.<sup>195</sup> The gesture, as reported by *Folha de S. Paulo*, reinforced the Brazilian “national pride”<sup>196</sup> since Silveira was remembered by his clashes with U.S. diplomacy—especially those regarding the visit of Mrs. Carter to Brazil in 1977. These initiatives led by the White House towards the South American country were an attempt to attenuate critics by the American Congress and the media. Republican senators stressed that Brazil had become a “lost partner”<sup>197</sup> due to Carter’s human rights campaign. At that point, the U.S. government aimed to host Figueiredo for an official visit in Washington DC—something that did not happen until the end of President Carter’s term.<sup>198</sup> As *Folha de S. Paulo* discussed the American’s approach to the new Brazilian government, the publication warned of the fact that the United States was about to face a new electoral process. “It would be inappropriate to establish close ties with Jimmy Carter’s negotiators at a time in which it may be the end of his administration,”<sup>199</sup> the newspaper stated. “Former Foreign Minister Azeredo da Silveira made the mistake of strengthening the relationship with Henry Kissinger. He bet on Ford and lost. The

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<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Laura Fonseca, 5.

<sup>195</sup> *Folha de S. Paulo*, “Figueiredo visita EUA no 2o semestre,” March 24, 1979, 5.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

consequences were catastrophic, since the first year of Carter's administration was characterized by bad will in the relationship with Brazil," it added.<sup>200</sup>

Despite the efforts made by the American government, Brasília continued to develop its own foreign policies. Figueiredo's Foreign Minister, Ramiro Saraiva Guerreiro, visited "Marxist Angola and Mozambique in Africa, as well as neutralist Tanzania", *The New Republic* described.<sup>201</sup> In fact, the United States welcomed better relations between Brazil and the African Marxist countries on the theory that this would provide a possible alternative to their close links with Cuba and the Soviet Union.<sup>202</sup> However, the American magazine said, the Brazilians "were doing it on their way, not as surrogates of the United States."<sup>203</sup> Moreover, the Peace Corps left Brazil in 1980 at Brazil's request and had never returned.<sup>204</sup> A Brazilian official told *The New York Times* that the country was still seeking partnerships with Washington DC, but Brasília wanted America's collaboration in a "less paternalistic way."<sup>205</sup>

Meanwhile, the South American nation proceeded with its steps toward liberalization under the regime's control. In August 1979, President Figueiredo signed an Amnesty Law that freed almost all political prisoners and exiles, although a provision of the same law exonerated all those government officials who had been involved in the torture of the regime's opponents.<sup>206</sup> The reception of those who had been forced out of the country became a daily ritual by the end of the 1970s.<sup>207</sup> In November 1979—as a demonstration that the regime was still with the control of the democratization process—the government issued the "Party Reform Bill", which fractured

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<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>201</sup> Tad Szulc, "Brazil's Interregnum," *The New Republic*, July 5, 1980, 18.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>204</sup> Warren Hoge. "Independence Established Brasília Reacts with Caution to Signal from Reagan," *New York Times*, January 4, 1981, 7.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>206</sup> Green, 349.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, 356.

the opposition into five distinct parties while the unpopular official party, ARENA, bonded together into a single organization and renamed itself the PDS (Democratic Social Party).<sup>208</sup>

In the 1980 U.S. presidential elections, Jimmy Carter lost the race to the former Governor of California, Ronald Reagan, in a campaign in which the relationship with Latin America was not a highly debated issue. The country was struggling with domestic challenges such as the energy crisis, unemployment, and inflation, and was preoccupied by the ongoing hostage crisis in Iran. Roger Fontaine, an adviser on LATAM affairs to Ronald Reagan, who later became a member of the National Security Council staff in the new administration, was in charge of discussing those affairs with the press. He told *The New York Times* that Reagan's presidency would observe better "methods and tones."<sup>209</sup> in dealing with Latin America. In this statement, he was referencing the tensions between President Carter and the countries in the region—especially during the first half of his administration when the First Lady met with leaders such as Brazil's President Ernesto Geisel. The impact of the democratic foreign policy reverberated beyond Carter's years in the Oval Office. President Figueiredo did not congratulate Ronald Reagan for his victory in the Electoral College. "It's their concern, not ours," he said.<sup>210</sup> If Brazil's military regime had come into the Carter years frustrated for having established close ties with Henry Kissinger, it left them even more disaffected. Despite Jimmy Carter's evolution toward more pragmatic diplomacy, Brazil's leaders had little desire to court a close relationship with Washington.

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<sup>208</sup> Thomas E. Skidmore, "Figueiredo." *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*, <https://library.brown.edu/create/fivecenturiesofchange/chapters/chapter-7/military-rule/figueiredo/>, (Providence: June, 2009). Accessed January 12, 2021.

<sup>209</sup> Hoge, 7.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

## 1. CONCLUSION

The political career of James Earl Carter Jr. demonstrates that the 39th President of the United States was a moderate politician. Before taking office as Governor of Georgia in 1971, he did not run as a progressive candidate. Carter started his political career in the early 1960s—a decade in which Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led the Civil Rights Movement from Atlanta. The future American president never appeared together in public with MLK, but Carter promised to invite Governor George Wallace from Alabama to visit Georgia during his successful gubernatorial campaign in 1970. When he ran for President in 1976 against President Gerald Ford, Carter saw the issue of human rights in Latin America as an opportunity to conquer liberal and conservative voters. Both groups aimed to see more political stability in the region—the first group due to ideological reasons and the second for the sake of a peaceful environment for businesses. The Democratic candidate's critiques against military regimes in Chile and Brazil annoyed South American officials, but helped him to be elected.

As the new U.S. chief of state, Carter pursued a foreign policy aligned with his electoral promises in the relationship with the Brazilian dictatorship. The First Lady's visit to Brasília and Recife in 1977 demonstrated the Carter's administration's antipathy toward the military regime. Moreover, the American attempt to force West Germany to cancel its nuclear agreement with Brazil was interpreted by Brasília as an attack on its national sovereignty. As the White House noticed that President Ernesto Geisel would not back off from his country's nuclear program and his government decided to terminate a 25-year military treaty with DC, Carter decided to be pragmatic. The U.S. president was under the pressure of American companies with business interests in Brazil, the press, and the U.S. Congress. When Carter visited Brasília in 1978 to meet

with Geisel, the White House did not criticize or mention the issue of human rights in Latin America, but this change in tone did little to repair the strained relationship between the two nations. Anti-American sentiment was widespread; like the nation's military leaders, the opposition in the National Congress and the left-wing student movements had little appreciation for Carter's foreign policy towards the country. External interference in domestic affairs was not acceptable in the Brazilian political landscape, and the U.S. presidential visit was not enough to minimize the diplomatic tension. President Geisel rejected an official invitation to visit Washington, and his successor in the presidential office, General João Figueiredo, did not express interest in rebuilding the relationship with the White House. Brazil not only went ahead with its nuclear program with Bonn, but also developed an independent foreign policy towards Portuguese-speaking nations in Africa—especially Angola, whose government was ideologically aligned with Moscow.

Carter's approach to Brazil, therefore, kept the two nations apart politically and diminished the influence of U.S. diplomacy in the South American nation—the largest economy and the most populous country of Latin America. As DC noticed that the measures implemented in the first two years of the new administration did not work effectively, the White House did not hesitate to give up its discourse pro-human rights in order to meet the demands of U.S. enterprises and attenuate the criticism from the conservative and liberal press. The attempts to appease Brazil's administration did not work as planned, however, and Brasília continued with its own foreign policies. Near the end of Carter's time in office, historical memory served to exacerbate already-strained relations. The military regime—especially under Figueiredo's leadership—was affected by the previous frustrating experience with the relationship with Gerald Ford's Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, who was replaced by Cyrus Vance due to Carter's

victory in 1976 against the incumbent Republican President. President Figueiredo, who took office in 1979, did not want to engage with an administration that might lose a presidential election in the following year.

The foreign policy of President Carter towards Brazil affected not only the relationship between the two governments but also the connections between these two nations. Brasília became afraid of establishing close links with DC since the transition between different U.S. administrations seemed to be unpredictable regarding their foreign policies. That can be seen by the way Brasília reacted to the results of the 1980 presidential election in which Ronald Reagan defeated his opponent Jimmy Carter. The new President was from another party and won that electoral race criticizing the policies of his predecessor. Nevertheless, Figueiredo did not congratulate the former Governor of California for his victory.

In the final analysis, the Carter administration's diplomatic efforts in Brazil were a failure. Seen through a broader lens, the story of this failure underscores the risks that the United States has historically taken, and continues to take, by implementing foreign policies without a deep understanding of the political landscape abroad. Acting unilaterally and from a position of ignorance can cause tensions with strategic partners and give rise to resistance against American diplomacy in all political fields, ranging from national governments to the political parties and popular movements that oppose them.

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