

# A Roundtable on Vanessa Walker, *Principles in Power: Latin America and the Politics of U.S. Human Rights*

Kyle Longley, Jeffrey F. Taffet, Evan R. Ward, Mateo Jarquin, Thomas C. Field, Jr.,  
and Vanessa Walker

## Roundtable Introduction

Kyle Longley

Scholars of the United States and Latin America will recognize that the arguments of the human rights advocates of the 1970s and 1980 sound eerily familiar to those of American activists in the 1920s who opposed Washington's interventions in the Caribbean Basin. Several non-governmental organizations joined together to protest U.S. interventions, especially in Haiti and Nicaragua. They called for withdrawal, highlighting widespread reports of Marine atrocities including the bombing of civilians and mutilation of corpses.

In particular, the All-American Anti-Imperialist League led the charge. Its members raised money for medical supplies for the insurgents led by Augusto César Sandino and hosted speeches of his brother, Socrates. They collaborated with like-minded congressmen as well as members of the media led by Carleton Beals at *The Nation* and a young Ernest Gruening. Ultimately, they helped pressure the Coolidge Administration into starting the process of withdrawing, a process aided by the Great Depression and the beginning of the Good Neighbor policy during the Hoover Administration.

Such activities in the 1920s and 1930s reinforce several valuable contributions of Vanessa Walker's *Principles of Power: Latin America and the Politics of U.S. Human Rights* including the diverse actors concentrating on human rights, the centrality of Latin America as America's workshop, and the challenges faced by the "movement" in changing the direction of U.S. foreign policy relating to Chile and Argentina in the 1970s and 1980s. It is a complex topic that Walker handles very deftly, making a significant contribution to the historiography on foreign relations and human rights as well as the larger context of the United States and Latin America.

A diverse group of scholars have reviewed the book for this forum. They generally praise the work including Thomas Fields who characterizes the book as "elegantly organized and beautifully written" and "among the most engaging recent works on U.S. relations with Latin America." He also highlights how Walker employs transnational historical methods and how she underscores the importance of non-state actors such as the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS). He concludes that Walker's "sober conclusions make Walker's book an uncomfortable yet

urgent read."

Fields finds little to criticize and focuses primarily on the many positives. Ultimately, Fields only notes that the "body of this book seems . . . to cut against the optimism of its conclusions" where the author recommends that U.S. citizens, especially vis-à-vis debates on human rights, continue to challenge U.S. policy. But this reflects more on the conclusions rather than the overall quality of the book.

Mateo Jarquin also compliments the book, highlighting that "Vanessa Walker's new book is a welcome scholarly intervention" in a fresh understanding of the origins of human rights policy. He adds: "Her historical analysis persuasively argues that any 21<sup>st</sup> century human rights policy should be both self-reflective—acknowledging violations at home as well as U.S. complicity in abuses abroad—and meaningfully integrated with broader strategic goals." He concludes that "*Principles in Power* is both valuable and timely."

Jarquin, however, critiques one element of the book, primarily its "laser focus on the Chilean and Argentine cases" that "undermines its aspirations to Latin Americanize the history of U.S. human rights policy." Instead, he proposes that the "book's arguments might have been bolstered by a minimal discussion" of the differences in U.S. policy toward the region including Cuba (Fidel Castro only receives one mention) as well as Nicaragua and the efforts against Anastasio Somoza Debayle (where Carter had some successes). Here, Jarquin believes even a minimal discussion would have strengthened elements of the argument and further highlighted how the region perplexed the Carter Administration including the fact the Argentine government provided funding governments in Nicaragua and Guatemala when Congress and the White House cut off aid. He concludes "these omissions do not detract from Walker's careful analysis of the Chilean and Argentine cases" but "they do raise questions about the use of those two countries as proxies for 'Latin America.'"

Jeffrey Taffet shares the impression of the others. He observes: "Among Walker's significant contributions in her well-executed and well-researched" book "is explaining the difficulties in transforming Carter's idealistic vision for a 'new American foreign policy' into practice." He adds: "Walker's emphasis on the role of human rights activists... is effective in illustrating the difficulties in developing a national human rights policy and in showing how the Carter administration changed over time."

Taffet does raise some areas to consider. First, he asks about "addressing cultural and historical ideas about Latin Americans" or "discussions over internationalism or

political power from a philosophical perspective," both of which could relate to answering the questions about what motivated people to focus on human rights. While difficult to develop for the heterogeneous group, it appears that asking questions on cultural and possibly socioeconomic positions might have been useful.

Finally, he notes the book "harkens to a different and earlier moment when US-Latin American relations was firmly a subfield of U.S. foreign relations history rather than of international history. The point of this book is not to explain how U.S. efforts in Latin America transformed Chile and Argentina, but in understanding how they transformed the United States." However, he stresses: "This is not a critique, but rather an observation from a historian who would like to see this kind of work appreciated as vital."

Evan Ward also finds many strengths in the work, highlighting that Walker "deftly creates a sophisticated model of how non-governmental organizations, Congress, and the executive branch influenced a more compassionate foreign policy." She does so by diving deep into the existing source material, both government and non-governmental.

He praises other elements, emphasizing: "Walker's signal contribution to the scholarship of U.S.-Latin American relations rests on her examination of how left-leaning advocacy organizations" including WOLA, IPS, and the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) "collectively known as 'The Movement' pressed for increased legislative oversight of presidential negotiations with Cold War allies that repeatedly violated the human rights of their citizens." Beyond the NGOs, Ward also highlights the role of Carter and government agencies including the State Department and Pentagon played in shaping what sometimes seemed a battle between the idealism and *realpolitik*, often leading to disconnects between major actors. By doing so allowed, Ward believes Walker developed the story *vis-à-vis* especially Chile and Argentina.

But Ward finds some challenges, largely and probably relating to his own focus as a Latin Americanist rather than foreign relations scholar. "The chief weakness of the study lies in the absence of an explanation of the tepid response of Latin American nations to U.S. Cold War policy generally." Part of this may relate according to Ward with "the heavy reliance on English-language documents" as well as what he feels is a "solid grounding in the contemporary and historical context of Latin American politics and history" which limited telling the story from the Latin American perspective, a problem often caused by the lack of availability of foreign archival sources as opposed to that found in places such as the United States or England.

In response, Williams directly addresses Ward's critique by highlighting other excellent works including those of Kathryn Shikink, Michael Schmidli, and Patrick Kelly who decenter the United States, stating: "My work does not seek to supplant these innovative works or contest the importance of their approach, but rather, to bring some of the dynamics and insights offered by these scholars 'home' to U.S. political history." She emphasizes wanting to highlight that the existing scholarship on human rights is often "Eurocentric" and many people treat Latin America as a periphery, but she clearly stresses the importance of Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s.

Williams spends a significant amount of time also addressing why she chose and emphasized the Southern Cone. She argues the region "took on an outsized role as emblematic of broader problems with U.S. power and thinking." She correctly stresses that the freshness of the U.S. role in the overthrow of Salvador Allende and the resulting bloodbath clearly affected the relationships. Williams also highlights the long-term debates over the U.S. support of right-wing friendly dictatorships (here, the influence of her undergraduate mentor David Schmitz is

obvious) and the concern extending back to 1945.

In response to Jarquin's critique of not even mentioning the significance of the Central American issues or Castro for example, she underscores: "I would argue the Southern Cone was uniquely influential in establishing the working assumptions and mechanisms which started before Carter's tenure." Here, there appears to be some disconnect between Williams and Jarquin. It appears Jarquin really seems to want not a full-scale examination but some acknowledgement in the introduction or conclusion that the Central American and Caribbean Basin cases mattered *vis-à-vis* human rights during the period discussed. But Williams clearly articulates a reasonable explanation of her choices.

In the final part of her response, Williams underscores one of her most significant contributions as she responds to Fields. "It seems to me we often fall into a no-win situation in conversations about where human rights fits into the U.S. foreign policy agenda," she notes. "I believe that my work shows that human rights is not necessarily a trade-off between morality and objectives like national security or economic development," she observes, adding, "the universalist rhetoric that accompanies human rights often makes tradeoffs and compromises unpalatable." But she concludes "like all interests, there are hard choices and moment when one issue will surpass another." This leads her to stress: "We need to accept compromise and grapple with these complexities in this as in all issues if we want to have viable policies." This complexity and nuance clearly show the author has addressed some of the major challenges of not only human rights policy, but the general challenges of issues including ideology in U.S. foreign policy.

In conclusion, these reviews clearly articulate the importance of this work in the historiography of U.S. foreign relations (particularly with Latin America) and human rights and its growing significance as a cornerstone of various administrations since the Carter Administration. Williams has shown the centrality of the Latin American case studies in countries that many people overlook, including some Latin Americanists. She skillfully weaves into the narrative the importance of non-governmental actors and shows both their successes as well as failures. Ultimately, this is a timely book as the Biden Administration tries to reestablish some credibility on the global stage relating to human rights after four years of the president gravitating towards dictators throughout the world, showing just how much the issues remain uncannily the same as the 1970s.

### Review of Vanessa Walker, *Principles in Power: Latin America and the Politics of Human Rights Diplomacy*

Jeffrey F. Taffet

As Vanessa Walker explains, President Jimmy Carter's May 1977 speech at Notre Dame laid out a "philosophical expression of the goals of integrating human rights into a broader reorientation of U.S. policy and interests that transcended old Cold War paradigms" (96). She quotes Carter's most poetic line, that "For too many years, we've been willing to adopt the flawed and erroneous principles and tactics of our adversaries, sometimes abandoning our own values for theirs. We've fought fire with fire, never thinking that fire is better quenched with water. This approach failed, with Vietnam the best example of its intellectual and moral poverty." Carter argued later in the speech that "it was a new world that calls for a new American foreign policy - a policy based on constant decency in its values and on optimism in our historical vision."<sup>1</sup>

Among Walker's significant contributions in her well-executed and well-researched *Principles in Power: Latin America and the Politics of Human Rights Diplomacy* is

explaining the difficulties in transforming Carter's idealistic vision for a "new American foreign policy" into practice. As she writes, in addressing the brutal dictatorships in Chile and Argentina, congressional leaders and human rights activists wanted immediate action and results. They wanted Carter to cut diplomatic ties and expected him to ostracize and isolate their leaders. But Carter, both instinctively and practically, believed such a course would not lead to the freeing of political prisoners and the end of repression. He thought it was more likely that critical engagement with the Chilean and Argentine regimes would lead to change; closing the door to bi-lateral conversations would just limit U.S. influence. He believed that without engagement repression might get worse, as there would be no reason for military regimes to modify their systems. As importantly, in considering how to push Latin American leaders, Carter was sensitive to charges that human rights policies could be understood as a form of imperialism. Chilean and Argentine leaders would become stronger and less resistant to external pressure if they could make the case to their citizens that the United States was trying to exert hegemonic power. Yet for activists and congressional leaders, a nuanced course of action seemed to legitimize dictatorship. It was realpolitik, of a kind, to critics who saw evil, and the critics abhorred compromising with that evil.

Walker's emphasis on the role of human rights activists, generally considered together in the text as "The Movement," is effective in illustrating the difficulties in developing a national human rights policy and in showing how the Carter administration changed over time. Groups such as the Institute for Policy Studies and the Washington Office on Latin America coordinated their efforts through the Human Rights Working Group to lobby sympathetic congressional leaders to cut U.S. aid to the South American dictatorships. Tracing their impact in the policy process allows Walker to tell a bigger and more meaningful story about public engagement in the making of foreign policy and to demonstrate the vital point that Carter was, in many ways, a follower as much as a leader in the construction of the human rights foreign policy agenda.

In the first chapter, Walker's deft exploration of U.S. responses to Augusto Pinochet's Chilean dictatorship from 1973 to 1977, before Carter's election, sets the framework for the rest of the text. Calling Chile a "catalyst," she argues that "The Movement" emerged in this period. She describes how efforts to challenge Pinochet's regime, and resistance from the Nixon and Ford administrations, energized leaders such as Joe Eldridge from the Washington Office on Latin America, as well as legislators like Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Donald Fraser (D-MN).

Emphasizing this pre-Carter period allows Walker to explain the larger human rights moment, and to contextualize Carter within that moment. It also allows her, toward the end of the text, to effectively explain how Carter's 1980 defeat was not the end of the human rights era. She emphasizes that Ronald Reagan's administration embraced its own rhetorical version of a human rights agenda. The key distinction, Reagan administration officials explained, was that Carter had overlooked the abuses of Communist regimes. Communists the world over had consistently violated the basic human rights of their people, and their global aspirations made them a far more potent threat than the military regimes in South America that were only doing their best to counter radical leftism.

The emphasis on Chile as a catalyst also raises questions though. It is not entirely clear why Movement leaders cared so much about human rights there, or about human rights in general. The same question can be asked about

activist congressional leaders. Why did they emphasize human rights? Why did they commit so much energy to this cause? Certainly, one obvious answer could be that they saw wrong in the world, and believed they had the power and the responsibility to become involved. But what distinguished them from other social justice activists?

For some Movement activists, especially exiles or those connected to Orlando Letelier's assassination, Chilean repression was obviously personal. That is a harder case for the bulk of U.S.-based activists for whom these issues were more abstract. Yes, Allende's saga was an international cause célèbre, but was that enough of an answer to call for a reorientation of U.S. foreign policy? Walker does not make the case that engaged officials and activists somehow felt responsible for the Chilean and Argentine coups. This was not about righting a historical wrong, it was about fixing Latin Americans, and it involved a kind of moral paternalism.

Walker does not go down this road though, and there is little in the text that addresses cultural and historical ideas about Latin Americans, or that engages discussions about internationalism or political power from a philosophical perspective. Without detours in these directions, the reader is left with questions about personal motivations, and the analysis remains at the level of what activists did, rather than why they did what they did. This is the case, as well, to some extent for Carter and his inner circle. They cared about human rights, but there is a missed opportunity in the text to place their concerns within a deeper vein of the national experience or their individual contexts. That is, Carter's personal position on this question might have been interesting to interrogate with different kinds of evidence that explored his background and its connection to his moral vision.

Greater engagement with cultural questions might have also allowed Walker to engage the Reagan administration's critique in other ways. Walker discusses Jeanne Kirkpatrick's infamous essay, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," and explains that its philosophy pervaded Reagan's inner circle. It is easy to critique Kirkpatrick's view as morally bankrupt and a shallow justification for changing tack on military dictatorships. But Kirkpatrick and Reagan were not completely wrong. Carter's administration *was* more engaged in fighting right-wing totalitarianism than left-wing totalitarianism, and with the exception of Jewish groups, the Movement looked south but not east.

For Carter, that may have been a concession to fighting the Cold War and a recognition of the limits of his power, but it also flew in the face of his own call for a "new American foreign policy" rooted in "constant decency in its values and on optimism in our historical vision." It also left him politically vulnerable as he had no effective response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; it seemed that his human rights agenda was blindly naïve in a world where neither Chile nor Argentina represented much of a threat to global security and where Communists were on the march.

Starting the text with the story about Chile and its impact on the development of the Movement also leads to questions about the longer history of human rights. Walker does not offer a full explanation about how concerns with human rights and criticisms of U.S. foreign policy as supportive of dictatorship predated the Chilean coup in 1973. Unquestionably, they gained prominence in its aftermath, and Chile may have been an accelerator, but human rights concerns were rooted in a longer narrative that challenged national direction and national morality on the global stage.

Walker does explain that the traumas of Vietnam

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were in the ether in which the Movement and human rights activism matured, but it might have been helpful to explore the connections between anti-war protests, the counterculture, and human rights concerns in greater depth. It would also have been fruitful to explore how movement leaders stood on fields sown by iconoclasts like Wayne Morse (D-OR). Throughout the 1960s, Morse waged a lonely battle to challenge U.S. foreign aid to dictatorships in places like Thailand, Egypt, and Indonesia. His opposition to the fighting in Vietnam, and his brave vote against the Gulf of Tonkin resolution (along with his ally Ernest Gruening (D-AK)) were functions of his belief that the central problem in Vietnam was that the United States was backing a repressive military dictatorship whose behavior was incompatible with U.S. national values.

Beyond Morse, and after his failed 1968 reelection effort, his colleagues in the Senate, including notably Frank Church (D-ID) and Jacob Javits (R-NY) increasingly prioritized human rights in their consideration of foreign aid bills. Opposition to supporting the Greek military, and anger about Nixon's lack of interest in the issue, was a key reason for the Senate's decision not to pass the foreign aid bill in October 1971 – the first time an aid bill had failed. Thus, a counterargument, or perhaps an extension or modification of Walker's argument, is that the Chilean regime's brutal repression began after human rights activism had already developed and that Chile should be seen instead as a vital accelerator to its maturation.

Walker is certainly well aware of the scholarship on the earlier roots of the human rights movement. She includes works by leading scholars on the issue, including Barbara Keys, William Michael Schmidli, and Sarah Snyder in her bibliography, and thanks all three in the acknowledgments. I suspect she would agree with my suggestion about Chile's place in the history of human rights in U.S. foreign policy. Her choices on this issue, if I read her correctly, are more about making a point about the centrality of U.S. relations with Latin American states. She wants to demonstrate how the Latin American timeline, with the Argentine coup following the Chilean one, created concerns within the United States about the region. She wants to explain how responses to Chile and Argentina advanced the cause of human rights policy in the United States government. Most importantly, she wants to emphasize that Chile and Argentina were the focus of human rights policy at the moment that human rights concerns were the most intense in U.S. history.

Considering Walker's text in this respect, as a study in how people in the United States understood Latin America, and how they tried to transform Latin American states, makes this book something of a throwback in the evolving historiography of US-Latin American relations. Most recent scholarship in the field has pursued a transnational approach in which U.S. policy is decentered in an effort to understand multiple perspectives within international relationships. The wide acclamation of Tanya Harmer's *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (2011) suggested that scholarship had to follow this model, and recent superlative work such as Eric Zolov's *The Last Good Neighbor: Mexico in the Global Sixties* (2020) and Amy Offner's *Sorting Out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and Developmental States in the Americas* (2019) has demonstrated its continuing vitality.

Walker's book swims against this current and harkens back to a different moment when US-Latin American relations was firmly a subfield of U.S. foreign relations history rather than of international history. The point of this book is not to explain how U.S. efforts in Latin America transformed Chile and Argentina, but explaining how they transformed the United States. Her narrative is firmly planted in the United States, and while the text does explain aspects of Chilean and Argentine history,

it does so mostly to explain U.S. action. This is not a critique, but rather an observation from a historian who would like to see this kind of work appreciated as vital. There is room for both kinds of scholarship, especially when done well, and perhaps Walker's considerable successes might free other scholars of U.S. foreign policy to embrace their inner U.S. domestic historian.

Note:

1. Jimmy Carter, "Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame, May 22, 1977," Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, eds., *The American Presidency Project*, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/243018> (accessed May 14, 2021).

### **An Inconvenient Presidency: James Earl Carter, the Battle for Democracy, and Vanessa Walker's *Principles in Power: Latin America and the Politics of U.S. Human Rights Diplomacy***

Evan R. Ward

In his highly anticipated opening statement on foreign policy, President Joseph Biden linked American "values" to the nation's objectives abroad. "We must start with diplomacy rooted in America's most cherished democratic values," he announced, "defending freedom, championing opportunity, upholding universal rights, respecting the rule of law, and treating every person with dignity." It was this constructive expression of human rights that would form the core, then, of his administration's comportment abroad. "That's the grounding wire of our global policy—our global power," Biden affirmed. "That's our inexhaustible source of strength. That's America's abiding advantage."<sup>1</sup>

Months earlier, when he was pitching his new biography of Jimmy Carter, the architect of modern human rights as a matrix for U.S. foreign policy, journalist-turned-biographer Jonathan Alter predicted that Biden would push for human rights. Contrasting the absence of a policy, not to mention a Department of State human rights appointee, during the Trump presidency, Alter envisaged that "within days of taking office, former Vice President Joe Biden and his choice for secretary of state [will] revive the human rights policy begun under [Jimmy] Carter and move to stem the authoritarian tide [of the early twenty-first century]."<sup>2</sup>

Released about the same time as Alter's *His Very Best: Jimmy Carter, A Life* (New York, 2020), Vanessa Walker's Cornell University imprint, *Principles in Power: Latin America and the Politics of U.S. Human Rights Diplomacy* (2020), provides a sophisticated prism for understanding the battle for democracy that lay at the heart of a Carter-driven human rights policy in U.S. foreign relations, forged in the aftermath of the Vietnam War and the Watergate Crisis. Like historian Greg Grandin, who contends that Latin America has served as a testing ground for U.S. foreign policy more generally, Walker contrasts the narrow interpretation of human rights as a policy directive (on display during the Ford and Reagan presidencies) with the more expansive approach the Carter administration took in its dealings with Argentina and Chile.<sup>3</sup> On the domestic front, Walker's study links the growing influence of non-governmental organizations on the decisions of Congress and the presidency following Vietnam and Watergate.

Walker's analysis begins in the immediate aftermath of Vietnam and Richard Nixon's resignation. These events called into question the status of democracy and the rule of law in the United States. With this succession of events, failures in foreign policy and presidential probity brought

to light disfunctions in the governing apparatus.

Walker considers the posture of the executive and legislative branches toward U.S. foreign policy in Argentina and Chile following the rise of authoritarian regimes in each South American republic. In Chile, Augusto Pinochet carried out a devastating attack on the Salvador Allende regime, punctuated by an air assault on La Moneda, Chile's seat of governing power, on September 11, 1973. Shortly thereafter, military generals in Argentina called an end to the chaos generated by Juan Peron's second administration (as well as the short-lived government of his third wife), mounting a coup that would give rise to a "dirty war" (1976–1983) against alleged communist agitators.

Walker's signal contribution to the scholarship of U.S.-Latin American relations rests on her examination of how left-leaning advocacy organizations, including the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), collectively known as "The Movement," pressed for increased legislative oversight of presidential negotiations with Cold War allies that repeatedly violated the human rights of their citizens. She effectively mines organizational newsletters and citizen-driven letter campaigns to sympathetic senators and congressional representatives during the Ford, Carter, and Reagan presidencies, and she notes a growing responsiveness in the executive branch to congressional and non-governmental critiques of official postures toward Argentina and Chile. These domestic displays of democratic practice were of great importance, as they led to closer executive oversight of military funding of the offending allies, particularly during the Carter presidency.

The structure of the book highlights the anomalous nature of Carter's sensitivity to universal human rights. In chapter 1, Walker contrasts Carter's human rights policy with the narrower formulation adopted by Gerald Ford's administration. The second chapter probes the complexities of Carter's articulation of a human-rights-focused foreign policy, and the following two chapters examine his efforts to persuade Chile (chapter 3) and Argentina (chapter 4) to abandon their authoritarian practices. Finally, chapter 5 points up the unique moment that was the Carter presidency by demonstrating Ronald Reagan's return to a more narrowly constructed human rights approach that privileged support for anti-communist regimes in Chile and Argentina.

While Walker deftly creates a sophisticated model of how non-governmental organizations, Congress, and the executive branch influenced a more compassionate foreign policy, the chief weakness of the study lies in the absence of an explanation for the tepid response of Latin American nations to U.S. Cold War policy generally. At the time, the Soviet Union trumpeted an anti-imperialist platform that was particularly appealing to nations decolonizing after World War II (principally in Africa and Asia). In contrast, the United States settled on a more conservative approach to securing allies in the bipolar struggle. Put another way, rather than offering the non-aligned nations a constructive set of ideals to be emulated, the United States raised the threat of a communist takeover as the primary reason to side with it against the Soviets.

George Kennan had held Latin Americans and their republics to a very low standard. He doubted their ability to guide democratic movements toward stable governments under the ominous threat of communist subversion, and he argued that

where the concepts and traditions of popular government are too weak to absorb successfully the intensity of communist attack, then we must concede that harsh governmental measures of repression may be the only answer; that these measures may have to proceed from regimes whose origins and methods would not stand the test of American concepts of democratic procedure; and that such regimes and such methods may be preferable alternatives, and indeed the only alternatives, to further communist successes.<sup>4</sup>

If these were the musings of a Soviet specialist sizing up New World republics that had nurtured liberal institutions with varying degrees of success since the first quarter of the nineteenth century, they still resonated during the Eisenhower presidency with John Foster Dulles' low estimation of these same nations' abilities to develop democracy as an antidote to Soviet onslaughts.

Indeed, as David M. Schmitz argues in *Thank God They're on Our Side: the United States and Right Wing Dictatorships, 1921–1965* (Chapel Hill, 1999), Cold War security often trumped promotion of democracy in the face of totalitarian threats. According to Dulles himself, the United States had "to take a realistic view of the situation and recognize that at this time, to support a somewhat backward situation, it is the lesser of two evils, because the possibility of peaceful change is very much diminished by the fact that you have constantly with you, for instance, the tactics of the Soviet Communist forces which take advantage of every opportunity to capture and lead the so-called reform [read, democratic] and revolutionary movement."<sup>5</sup>

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These conservative policies, bereft of—or even antagonistic to—the ideals of open society, fell still further below what Latin American diplomats, domestic leaders, or even citizens hoped to gain from Cold War collaboration with the United States. When presented with the Charter of the Organization of American States at Bogota in 1948, the United States exacted full support for anti-communist initiatives throughout Latin America. This support materialized in the form of the National Security Doctrine, in which the United States,

borrowing from the Monroe Doctrine, pledged to thwart hemispheric challenges to liberal republics of the Americas while ceding internal control of communist threats to national governments (and militaries) that would be supported with United States military aid.

As historian Robert Trask has noted, however, assenting Latin Americans aspired to greater economic and social support in exchange for their loyalty. To their consternation, Trask writes, "the Latin American delegates, still concerned about the political and economic dominance of the United States in the hemisphere, hoped that the OAS would lead to genuine equality of nations in the region and provide a framework for the economic development of the American republics." What they received was much different, for "the United States, as events later would make clear, looked upon the OAS mainly as an agency for collective defense in the Americas; from this perspective, the new OAS was consistent with and a part of the containment policy."<sup>6</sup>

If Walker elides much of this background, which is inevitable in part because of her heavy reliance on English-language documents, she effectively identifies the source and methods through which Carter articulated his constructive formulation of human rights as a foreign policy objective. As for the source of his ideas, Walker notes that Carter's agenda closely followed the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Rights (1948).

According to her analysis, Carter used an expansive definition of human rights that went far beyond the absence of torture and genocide and the suppression of basic freedoms and provided for the very economic and social benefits envisioned by Latin American delegates at the OAS's opening conference in Bogota a generation earlier.

Thereafter, Walker points to this more positive formulation of human rights as a key distinguishing factor, in addition to greater transparency in dealing with Congress, between Carter's administration and the Ford and Reagan presidencies, which interpreted human rights more narrowly. It was for this reason that Latin American governments were joined by U.S. officials during the Reagan presidency in acknowledging the singularity of Carter's interpretation of human rights, which included "a broad spectrum of rights, including food, health care, and education, as well as bodily integrity and personal liberty" (204).

Indeed, as Robert Pastor, Carter's go-to advisor on Latin America, observed in retrospect, "Carter is clearly viewed as a man of great moral stature in Latin America, and that inspires the young and the democratic and embarrasses, and unfortunately, sometimes infuriates some of the conservatives and the military. Carter's stature has translated into real influence unlike anything the U.S. has had since we turned in our gunboats, and at the same time, it has given the U.S. a future in Latin America, which we had almost lost" (188).

In addition to identifying the source of Carter's human rights agenda, Walker's book also examines his *modus operandi*: the application of persuasion through dialogue with allies and adversaries alike. In the case of Argentina and Chile, members of the Movement deiced the president's invitation to Augusto Pinochet and Jorge Rafael Videla to the ceremonial return of the Panama Canal to Panama in Washington in 1978. Carter had hoped his engagement would persuade them into compliance with the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

Walker underscores the frustration of citizens, bureaucrats, and politicians sympathetic to Carter's vision, though not his methods. In this she concurs with Hal Brands, one of the more recent analysts of the Cold War in Latin America, who writes that "Carter's human rights policies were continually contested and imprecise. The State Department, NSC, and Defense Department bickered over both the ultimate aim of the policy and how strictly it should be enforced."<sup>7</sup> It would only be in retrospect, during the Reagan presidency, Walker notes, that members of the Movement would come to appreciate what they had lost.

A secondary theme throughout Walker's book is the elevated status that Latin America held in foreign policy considerations during Jimmy Carter's presidency. Some of this may have been personal preference. Carter spoke Spanish and in an earlier era spent time evangelizing barrios in Springfield, Massachusetts, with a Cuban American pastor.<sup>8</sup> It was more likely, however, that the geographic exigencies of the Cold War, with the closing of the Vietnam theater and the proximity of Cuba, led him to attend more closely to problems closer to home. If Carter's overtures to South American dictators raised the hackles of the Movement, his dialogues with Castro, as well as his support for home-grown democracy in Nicaragua, raised questions among hawkish conservatives as to his fitness for Cold War standoffs.

Greg Grandin has written extensively about Latin America as a testing ground for more expansive U.S. policies farther afield, particularly in relation to the post-9/11 context of the U.S. War in Iraq.<sup>9</sup> Walker, in turn, situates the region in that same role during the struggle of

human rights and U.S. policy in the Southern Cone. While foreign policy initiatives further abroad may have attracted more attention, Walker writes, "Chile, and later Argentina, became the place to test the United States' commitment to human rights and measure both the administration's effectiveness and sincerity" (111). In that spirit, key mechanisms for decertifying military aid to unsavory allies took root, as did a human rights verification process often seen as interventionist by offending nations (including Chile and Argentina).

In the final chapter of the book, Walker illustrates how Latin America exposed the Reagan administration's neglect of human rights and its penchant for focusing instead on Soviet violations of the Helsinki Accords (1975). In this sense, Reagan's approach to foreign affairs was a return to the days of John Foster Dulles and George Kennan: anti-communist measures trumped the promotion of democracy. Walker underscores how this about-face—from what was viewed as Carter's inconvenient policy—put the ruling juntas back into the good graces of the Reagan administration, negating progressive strides achieved in the late 1970s. She quotes Iowa congressman Tom Harkin, who noted that "we all acknowledged that the Carter policy has flaws, but in comparison with what we have seen in the past 11 months, it is a model of sobriety and effectiveness. [The] new administration has launched a full-scale attack on the policy of human rights" (242–43).

The significance of Walker's contribution to the history of human rights as a centerpiece of U.S. foreign policy generally and of her treatment of human rights more particularly in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s cannot be overstated, given the growing importance of the constructive interpretation of human rights envisioned not only by Carter, but increasingly, by his successors, whose world was more sensitive to environmental, economic, and social inequities—inequities that the Reagan administration refused to acknowledge. Ultimately, Walker notes, Carter's "was a legacy that helped legitimize human rights in international relations and moved the U.S. government to embody those concerns in its policies and procedures" (252).

Carter biographer Jonathan Alter concurs in his recent work, observing that "Carter's emphasis on human rights proved surprisingly durable. Even after Reagan's first secretary of state, Alexander Haig, said human rights would take a 'backseat' to fighting terrorism, neither he nor other Reagan-era policymakers fully abandoned the Carter policy."<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, Walker's analysis transcends the narrow temporal constraints of her study, identifying Carter's brand of self-critical assessment as a model followed by later occupants of the Oval Office, most notably Barack Obama (his 2009 speech in Cairo comes to mind) and now President Joseph Biden.<sup>11</sup>

Walker's study could benefit, I believe, from a more solid grounding in the contemporary and historical context of Latin American politics and history. Providing more background in these areas would add deeper significance to the import (as well as the weaknesses) of Carter's work. However, the absence of such backgrounding is compensated for by the dual articulation of how democracy and diplomacy interacted in the late twentieth century to redefine foreign policy objectives in ways that were more consonant with the values espoused by Carter and his successors.

Notes:

1. Joseph Biden, "Remarks by President Biden on America's Place in the World," February 4, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov>.

gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-americas-place-in-the-world/.

2. Jonathan Alter, "How the United States Learned to Love Human Rights," *Foreign Policy*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/29/human-rights-jimmy-carters-legacy-is-on-the-2020-ballot/#>. The essay is an excerpt from Alter's biography of Carter, *His Very Best: Jimmy Carter, A Life* (New York, 2020), released the same day.

3. Grandin argues at length that Latin America has served as an incubator for many of the East-West policies sponsored by the United States. See his revised and expanded *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Making of Imperial America* (New York, 2021).

4. George Kennan, "Latin America as a Problem in U.S. Foreign Policy," in Michael J. LaRosa and Frank O. Mora, eds., *Neighborhood Adversaries: Readings in U.S.-Latin American Relations*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD, 2015), 150.

5. See David F. Schmitz, "The Lesser of Two Evils [an excerpt from his 1999 UNC Press monograph, *Thank God They're on Our Side*]," in James A. Wood, ed., *Problems in Modern Latin American History: Sources and Interpretations*, 4th ed. (Lanham, MD, 2014), 201–2. The quote is taken from Schmitz's quoted material.

6. Roger R. Trask, "The Impact of the Cold War on U.S.-Latin American Relations, 1945–1949," in LaRosa and Mora, "Latin America as a Problem," 137.

7. Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), 176–77.

8. See Jimmy Carter, *Living Faith* (New York, 1996), 216–19.

9. See note 3.

10. Alter, "How the United States Learned to Love Human Rights."

11. For the full transcript of Obama's watershed speech on U.S.-Muslim relations, see <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-cairo-university-6-04-09>.

### Review of Vanessa Walker, *Principles in Power: Latin America and the Politics of U.S. Human Rights Diplomacy*

Mateo Jarquín

Most observers of international politics seem to agree: The United States has arrived at a critical juncture in its relationship with the world. Both critics and supporters of the outgoing administration recognize that Trump's diplomatic strategies disrupted decades-old doctrines and standard operating procedures. Thus, the Biden administration is confronted with the opportunity—the imperative, perhaps—to reset U.S. foreign policy, rethinking its primary aims and tools. As Kathryn Sikkink and John Shattuck recently explained in *Foreign Affairs*, the Trumpian disruption was decidedly for the worse when it came to human rights advocacy.<sup>1</sup> As a result, restructuring in this realm is especially urgent.

Any reset should be historically informed. In particular, fresh perspectives on the origins of U.S. human rights policy can help us better understand why powerful states sometimes advance the cause of human dignity and justice abroad, how such policies overlap with their economic and security interests, and what basic tradeoffs emerge when diplomats attempt to modulate the behavior of rights-abusing regimes. Vanessa Walker's new book is a welcome scholarly intervention in this regard. Her historical analysis persuasively argues that any 21<sup>st</sup>-century human rights policy should be both self-reflective—acknowledging violations at home as well as U.S. complicity in abuses abroad—and meaningfully integrated with broader strategic goals.

Walker bases her claims in a careful examination of U.S. policy toward Chile and Argentina under the Ford, Carter, and Reagan administrations. These two

South American countries offer a good vantage point for students of human rights policy. Like most Latin American countries in the 1970s, both were ruled by military dictatorships guilty of systematic human rights violations against dissidents including torture, disappearances, and extrajudicial killings. Notably, Chile's Pinochet and Argentina's Military Junta committed these crimes in the name of values espoused by the United States in the global Cold War. Because these governments firmly aligned with Washington, dutifully collaborating with (and at times exceeding) U.S. anti-communist campaigns in the Western Hemisphere, American policymakers found it harder to condemn abuses in Santiago and Buenos Aires than in, say, Hanoi or Bucharest. And because their government was complicit in Chilean and Argentine misconduct through arms sales and diplomatic backing, U.S. activists and human rights-oriented political voices paid special attention to these South American countries.

Chile and Argentina were emblematic of a broader shift in U.S. diplomacy in the 1970s. Under the Carter administration, American diplomats became more vocally critical of abuses by allies in the Global South such as Iran and South Korea. In the case of Chile and Argentina, a real decline in U.S. military assistance accompanied the changing rhetoric. *Principles in Power* forces us to rethink the causes and nature of this policy change. Interestingly, the debates that emerged in Washington about Pinochet and the Argentine junta did not revolve exclusively around the best way to moderate their behavior. Nor was the human rights conversation within the Carter administration strictly concerned with appeasing an increasingly rights-conscious electorate. Walker demonstrates that there was much more at stake. After all, unlike abuses in the Eastern Bloc, one could make the argument that human rights violations in Latin America's Southern Cone—where Soviet involvement was virtually non-existent and the threat of a "second Cuba" was remote—actually stemmed from U.S. policy. Therefore, the push for a human rights-oriented policy encompassed a broader discussion of U.S. Cold War interventionism abroad, the growing power of the presidency, and the lack of transparency and accountability in the making of foreign policy.

In nuancing the origins of contemporary U.S. human rights policy, Walker makes several contributions to the broader literature. First, she expands the universe of key actors. The traditional elite players are still there; for instance, the tension between Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski is a familiar theme. But the book places

special emphasis on a constellation of left-leaning human rights activists—including NGOs such as the Human Rights Working Group (HRWG) and the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)—which she refers to as "the Movement." Congressional dynamics, electoral politics, and bureaucratic knife-fighting also play important roles. A multidimensional portrait serves key purposes in the wider argument. For the Movement, advocacy was designed not only to mitigate abuses in countries like Chile and Argentina, but also to curb U.S. interventionism in the so-called Third World and, at the same time, devolve greater foreign policy decision-making to the legislative branch. South American activists also helped set the agenda, demonstrating that foreign actors can be part of the U.S. foreign policy apparatus, too. This multiplicity of viewpoints is nicely integrated into the well-written narrative. Taken together, they show that the Movement's core principles—that human rights abuses in Latin America

were connected to U.S. hegemony in the region, and that the persistence of those abuses helped erode democratic norms and procedures at home—informed the Carter administration's dealings with the Chilean and Argentine regimes.

The book's multinational archival base and multisided framing helps it illustrate the numerous tradeoffs that U.S. policymakers encountered as they sought to promote rights in those countries. For example, the Carter White House worried about how to distance itself from these abusive allies without sacrificing the leverage necessary to influence their behavior. U.S. officials also grappled constantly with the relative efficacy of using "carrots" versus "sticks" as tools to that end. In Santiago and Buenos Aires, Carter also faced a uniquely Latin American dilemma. How could an updated U.S. foreign policy acknowledge its past history of interventionism in the region, while at the same time promising to more aggressively police the behavior of its governments when it came to human rights? Right-wing Chilean and Argentine leaders often used the anti-imperialist rhetoric of national sovereignty – more often associated with the region's revolutionary Left – to counteract American human rights promotion. In addressing this understudied dynamic, *Principles in Power* contributes to a historiographical shift where, rather than seeing these South American governments as "puppets" of the United States, scholars increasingly treat them as autonomous, "fractious" allies with some power in the relationship<sup>2</sup>

More generally, Walker also works to position Latin America as an important site for the development of basic U.S. foreign policy approaches to the rest of the world. Historians have long seen Latin America as a sort of "workshop" where the United States has tested out policies and strategies it would later apply elsewhere. For example, Greg Grandin has explored how 20<sup>th</sup>-century interventions in the Western Hemisphere informed 21st-century military adventures in the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> But *Principles in Power* shows that Latin America matters beyond the realm of military interventionism. The first chapter describes how Chilean politics catalyzed the rise of the Movement in the Ford years. The bulk of the book's chapters focus on the Carter administration, when "Latin America policy became a crucible for policy pairing human rights with greater respect for national sovereignty, and for challenging traditional Cold War alignments and interests."<sup>4</sup> A final chapter on Reagan shows how his administration did not reverse but instead reinvented human rights policy. Under his watch, policymakers construed rights violations as a problem caused by communist subversion rather than U.S. policies, and argued that rights-abusing allies like Chile and Argentina – "partners in arms for human freedom" – were part of the solution rather than the problem.<sup>5</sup> The narrative leaves no doubt that, to understand Carter's approach to the Helsinki Accords or Reagan's aggressive condemnation of human rights abuses in Eastern Europe, one should first look at how they approached Latin America.

Unfortunately, the book's laser focus on the Chilean and Argentine cases undermines its aspiration to Latin Americanize the history of U.S. human rights policy. Walker acknowledges that these two neighboring countries on the southern extreme of the continent "do not represent the experiences of all Latin America."<sup>6</sup> She also succeeds in showing that these two countries played a special, motivating role in the rise of the Movement and organizations such as the Washington Office on Latin America; "I find that it's appropriate," wrote the institution's first director, "to mention Chile and WOLA in the same sentence."<sup>7</sup> The roughly coterminous anti-communist dictatorships in nearby Bolivia, Argentina,

Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay simply did not receive the same combined emphasis from American policymakers and activists. But the book's arguments might have been bolstered by a minimal discussion of how U.S. human rights policy varied in those countries as a result of what Walker would call their "context-specific" attributes. Absent such an analysis, one is just left to assume that the dilemmas of rights promotion in Montevideo or Brasilia were similar, rather than different, to those in Santiago and Buenos Aires.

Readers almost certainly would have benefited from brief comparisons to Central America, where Carter and Reagan faced human rights challenges of a different scope and nature than the ones they encountered in South America. In the 1970s and early 1980s, allied governments in Guatemala (with Argentine support, incidentally) committed abuses on such a monstrous scale that a United Nations report later argued that genocide had taken place.<sup>8</sup> In neighboring El Salvador, a U.S.-backed military regime behaved similarly; in the first year of Reagan's presidency, it perpetrated what WOLA officially considers to be "the worst massacre ever against civilians by state actors in Latin America."<sup>9</sup> Given the magnitude of these and other crises, Walker's repeated emphasis on the centrality of Chile and Argentina sometimes feels unnecessary.

More importantly, Central America was essential to the policy debates described in *Principles in Power*. Consider the unmentioned case of Nicaragua which, as Walker

has written elsewhere, was a crucial test of Carter's human rights policy.<sup>10</sup> Scholars of the 1979 Sandinista Revolution agree that U.S. human rights policies helped determined the overthrow of the allied Somoza dictatorship by Cuban-aligned rebels because, as in Tehran, the Carter administration felt uneasy about providing potentially decisive military aid to a notoriously abusive government

in Managua.<sup>11</sup> Reaganite conservatives subsequently used the rise of the Sandinistas to portray Carter's human rights promotion as hypocritical (because, in their view, socialist guerrillas were inherently worse for human rights than right-wing dictators) and counterproductive (because the U.S. was dealt a strategic blow as a result). In discussing how Reagan "reinvented" human rights to suit his virulent anti-communism and militarized foreign policy, Walker rightly refers to an influential 1979 essay by top diplomat Jeane Kirkpatrick. In "Dictatorship and Double Standards," she blasted Carter for chastising friendly anti-communist authoritarians instead of focusing on crimes committed in socialist countries. But in developing her argument, Kirkpatrick mentions Brazil, Chile, and Argentina only in passing, alongside other allies such as Taiwan. Instead, Iran and Nicaragua were the prime examples she explored in great detail to argue that under Carter, the U.S. "had never tried so hard and failed so utterly to make and keep friends in the Third World."<sup>12</sup>

While these omissions do not detract from Walker's careful analysis of the Chilean and Argentine cases, they do raise questions about the implied use of those two countries as proxies for "Latin America." After all, Central America posed a fundamentally different dilemma to U.S. human rights policy than the Southern Cone of South America. Though Chilean and Argentine leaders justified their abuses as a logical response to communist subversion, their regimes were never really threatened by armed revolution. In Guatemala, by contrast, the state committed its abuses in the context of a decades-long armed conflict against leftist guerrillas. In El Salvador, the armed Left twice came close to toppling a U.S.-backed government. It succeeded in Nicaragua. In this much more heated Cold War environment, the cost-benefit analysis of human rights promotion surely looked different. Connecting

Walker's insights on Southern Cone policy to the broader regional context – including the Cuban Revolution, which surprisingly is largely absent from this story – would enhance the discussion of Cold War Latin America as a staging ground for the germination of post-Cold War U.S. foreign policies.

These issues aside, *Principles in Power* is both valuable and timely. Its detailed study of U.S. policy in Chile and Argentina complicates the origins of official human rights advocacy and, as the book promises, shows historians the varied and sometimes conflicting purposes of this policy. At the same time, it raises deep questions for activists and policymakers currently pondering the future of human rights at a time of potential change in U.S. foreign policy.

#### Notes:

1. John Shattuck and Kathryn Sikkink, "Practice What You Preach: Global Human Rights Leadership Begins at Home," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2021.
2. See Max Paul Friedman, "Retiring the Puppets, Bringing Latin America Back In: Recent Scholarship on United States-Latin American Relations," *Diplomatic History* 27(5), 2003: 621-636 and Tanya Harmer, "Fractious Allies: Chile, the United States, and the Cold War, 1973-76," *Diplomatic History* 37(1), 2013: 109-143.
3. Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).
4. Walker, *Principles in Power*, 64.
5. *Ibid.*, 207.
6. *Ibid.*, 5.
7. *Ibid.*, 253.
8. "Guatemalan Army Waged 'Genocide,' New Report Finds," *The New York Times*, February 26, 1999.
9. "Tracking El Salvador's Progress in Historic Human Rights Cases," *Washington Office on Latin America*, October 27, 2017.
10. David Schmitz and Vanessa Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights: The Development of a Post-Cold War Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History* 28(1), 2004: 113-143.
11. See, for example, Robert Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua* (New York: Routledge, 1987).
12. Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorships & Double Standards," *Commentary*, November 1979.

### Review of Vanessa Walker, *Principles in Power: Latin America and the Politics of U.S. Human Rights Diplomacy*

Thomas C. Field Jr.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, historians have produced a growing body of research on the role of human rights in United States foreign policy. It is a rich literature, offering a mixed assessment of the interplay between and relative capabilities of transnational nonstate activists, national governments, multilateral organizations, and superpowers. Like the contemporary human rights movement itself, this historiography has centered on parallel threads of human rights activism in Latin America and Europe that were sparked by disparate events, such as the 1973 Chilean *coup d'état* and the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.<sup>1</sup>

As the subfield developed, scholars reached further backward to answer broader questions about the origins of the discourse in United States and world history.<sup>2</sup> In the process, historians of human rights helped to pioneer the transnational turn in diplomatic history, ushering in fresh narratives of moments when nonstate activists shaped superpower foreign policies and international politics as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these accomplishments, international historians have identified frequent counterexamples where assertive governments were able to coopt, or "capture," the activities of nonstate actors, oftentimes gaining the upper

hand.<sup>4</sup> Something of a historiographical stalemate has been reached, with existing literature pointing to a longstanding contradiction in which nonstate activist diplomacy emerges as both anti-imperial and interventionist, as social democratic and liberal capitalist. In short, it appears as both a leftwing and a rightwing political discourse. Those reading or writing histories of transnationalism and human rights may find this dualism rather disorienting.

Vanessa Walker's powerful new book *Principles in Power* wrestles with these complex paradoxes. Elegantly organized and beautifully written, it is among the most engaging recent works on U.S. relations with Latin America. The book traces the emergence of the post-Vietnam human rights movement, a surviving expression of New Deal left-liberalism that quickly metastasized to include contradictory ideological currents from the Marxist left to the neoconservative right. The former took advantage of a 1970s spirit of détente to mount a human rights defense of Chile's ill-fated socialist democracy, while the latter doubled down on longstanding U.S. opposition to leftist governments in Latin America by blending human rights with resurrected "traditions of American military strength and liberal internationalism" (249).

Taking up over half the book, Walker's reconstruction of the emergence of human rights politics toward Latin America just before and during the early Jimmy Carter administration is invaluable. After four decades of Cold War triumphalism and "humanitarian intervention" from Cuba to the Balkans to Somalia to Iraq to Libya to Venezuela, it is difficult even for many historians to recall how a specific discourse of Latin America human rights briefly emerged in détente-era United States as "a self-critical policy to address the failings of Cold War paradigms for domestic and foreign political power...a way to demonstrate an increased respect for sovereignty in the region and divorce the United States from interventionist legacies" (5, 10).

Despite representing a temporary departure from the liberal interventionism of earlier twentieth-century versions of human rights and humanitarianism, the anti-interventionists proposed a logical premise: the United States should apply human rights criteria primarily to its domestic sphere and to territories under allied control. To reverse this logic, as previous and subsequent administrations did by principally condemning *enemies'* human rights abuses, would be futile at best. At worst, it would fuel regime-change operations that resulted in new waves of deprioritized human rights abuses by the United States and its allies.

To explain the brief emergence of an idiosyncratic, anti-interventionist version of human rights politics, Walker employs transnational historical methods to highlight the role played by nonstate activists like the progressive liberal Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) and the leftist Institute for Policy Studies (IPS). Catalyzed by widespread revulsion to Washington's material support for far-right military governments in Latin America, especially in post-coup Chile, this collection of religious progressives, mainstream liberals, and the emergent left took advantage of the spirit of détente to redefine human rights politics as requiring a hands-off, non-interventionist foreign policy toward the Western Hemisphere.

Unlike the original Good Neighbor Policy four decades earlier, however, the 1970s version called for *cuts* to U.S. military and economic support to dictatorships, resulting in Latin American juntas responding aggressively (and with nationalist vitriol) to what they suspected to be liberal imperialist meddling. In 1977, the minister-counselor at the U.S. embassy, Thomas Boyatt, met with Augusto Pinochet and reported that the dictator had raged at U.S. interference, declaring that "Chile was not a US colony." That statement was ironically becoming increasingly true in the wake of Congress's restrictions on U.S. military aid after the passage

of the Harkin amendment two years earlier (47–57, 126).

When the Carter administration and its erstwhile allies ran out of tools to wield against abuses in Chile and Argentina, they became painfully aware of the limitations of an anti-interventionist human rights discourse. It didn't accomplish much beyond merely disassociating the United States from ongoing abuses. Nor was the administration wrong to suspect that Latin American militaries would not hesitate to reassess their alignment with the United States if it were deemed necessary for their own survival (150, 197–98). Indeed, after Congress succeeded in ending direct U.S. complicity in human rights abuses in Chile and Argentina by implementing wholesale pauses in new military contracts, progressive activists showed their true interventionist colors by pushing for further punitive policies, such as pressuring international financial institutions to condition their lending on human rights records. Those suggestions were followed by proposals for U.S. government measures against Wall Street banks that conducted business with the South American dictatorships.

By meticulously reconstructing the chronologies of these competing tendencies within human rights politics, Walker's study brilliantly reveals how short-lived its anti-imperialist version was and how quickly human rights discourses reverted to their entrenched tradition of liberal interventionism. It was one thing to convince Congress to cut off aid to human rights abusers. It was another thing entirely to mobilize U.S. foreign policy behind economic sanctions or regime change policies targeting allied countries.

These sober conclusions make Walker's book an uncomfortable yet urgent read. Its surprisingly gripping narrative takes place almost entirely in Washington, DC, and to a lesser extent in Santiago, Chile. Argentina appears relatively late in the book (page 154–204), though it provides an excellent counterexample to Chile, in that the United States was less directly complicit in Argentinian human rights abuses. This lack of direct involvement obliged the Carter administration to resort to interventionist tones from the beginning and almost immediately provoked strong nationalist reactions from the Argentine government. (Walker includes priceless interviews with U.S. embassy officer "Tex" Harris, a fearless crusader against the junta in Buenos Aires.)

While this material is a bit jarring, coming after so many pages on the more obvious U.S. role in military Chile, the Argentina chapter nonetheless serves an important purpose. It was at this juncture that U.S. human rights politics approached their limit; and at this moment one can already sense the emergence of more traditional, interventionist versions of human rights diplomacy, tendencies that were easily repurposed by the rightist Reagan administration.

Walker concludes her book with a series of observations that call into question the long-term capacity of human rights politics to achieve anything resembling an anti-interventionist movement in the United States. Concluding that it is exceedingly difficult to reconcile human rights discourses with the overriding discursive imperative of national interest, her book implicitly suggests that human rights will always be a weak foundation for foreign policy making. Instead, human rights politics nearly always operate as a vehicle for concrete (though slightly veiled) ideological visions and are easily repurposed to defend (or attack) anything from fascist dictatorship to liberal capitalism to social democracy to hard-left communism. Like the term "democracy" during the Cold War and beyond, "human rights" appeals seem to be fungible to the point of meaninglessness, a conclusion supported by its dual adoption in the 1980s by Fidel Castro and Reagan's human rights guru, Elliot Abrams (237–47).

Meaningless, perhaps, but compelling and politically

useful. At least for interventionist purposes, as Jimmy Carter himself recognized once his administration started running out of anti-interventionist tools in the summer of 1978. The body of this book seems, therefore, to cut against the optimism of its conclusion, in which Walker recommends human rights discourse for anti-interventionist U.S. citizens who wish to engage in "patriotic criticism" of U.S. foreign policy and to pressure policymakers to "address the United States' own shortcomings and problematic behaviors" (252–53). Unless movements articulate an alternative foreign policy of their own, their human rights discourse calling for a more "self-reflective policy" will likely continue to be outmatched by more purposeful interventionist voices pushing for "modern iterations of nation building and human rights as regime change" (250).

Notes:

1. Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge, UK, 2011); and Patrick William Kelly, *Sovereign Emergencies: Latin America and the Making of Global Human Rights Politics* (Cambridge, UK, 2018).
2. Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA, 2012); Sarah B. Snyder, *From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York, 2018).
3. Sarah B. Snyder, "Bringing the Transnational In: Writing Human Rights into the International History of the Cold War," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 23 (2013): 100–102, 112.
4. On great power co-optation of nonstate activists, broadly speaking, since the late nineteenth century, see Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (New York, 2013). For a more specific example of superpower co-optation of transnational labor activists, see Thomas C. Field Jr., "Union Busting as Development: Transnationalism, Empire, and Kennedy's Secret Labour Programme for Bolivia," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 52 (2020), 27–51.

## Author's Response

Vanessa Walker

I would like to start by thanking the participants in this roundtable. This past year has been uniquely demanding, and I am grateful that this group of accomplished scholars was willing to engage with my work so thoughtfully. I appreciate that each was able both to capture my argument and to raise compelling questions about the fields and topics I sought to engage. Their reflections and insights remind me what a complex and exciting moment it is to be writing about the intersection of U.S.-Latin American relations and human rights.

Rather than respond to each reviewer individually, I want to address a few central, interconnected themes that run through their comments and my book. First, I found it necessary to place Latin America at the center of the 1970s human rights moment. *Principles in Power* is certainly not the first scholarly work to stress the importance of Latin America to human rights in the late Cold War. Other excellent books, including those by Patrick Kelly, Michael Schmidli, and Kathryn Sikkink, have illuminated the essential work done by Latin American actors in elevating human rights on the global stage in the late Cold War. Moreover, as Jeffrey Taffet notes, there has been a proliferation of scholarship on what Gil Joseph called the "Latin Americanization" of the Cold War that decenters the United States and contextualizes its international power.<sup>1</sup> Despite these innovative works, Latin America is often treated as peripheral to the key ideas of U.S. foreign policy and political history. Ongoing debates about human rights as Eurocentric, for example, underscore the work that still needs to be done to treat Latin America as more than a subfield of U.S. foreign relations and integrate it into U.S.

and international history and historiography beyond the hemisphere.<sup>2</sup>

My work seeks to build on the robust literature centering Latin American perspectives and dynamics by bringing the insights offered by these scholars “home” to U.S. political history. In a 2005 essay, Robert McMahon argues that the history of U.S. foreign relations is “intrinsicly, a Janus-faced field, one that looks both outward and inward for the wellsprings of America’s behavior in the global arena.”<sup>3</sup> *Principles in Power* stresses how central Latin American actors and ideas were to the conception of human rights and reform of power *within* the United States itself, which in turn had broad implications far beyond the hemisphere. As Evan Ward rightly notes, a central goal of this work is to articulate “how democracy and diplomacy interacted in the late twentieth century to redefine foreign policy objectives more consonant with the values espoused by [Jimmy] Carter and his successors.”

Focusing on Latin America reveals that the notion of U.S. complicity in human rights abuses was essential in linking democracy and diplomacy in the 1970s. In the Western Hemisphere, human rights discourse emerged not as a way for governments to criticize one another, but as a language citizens could use to challenge their own governments’ practices and policies. In Chile and Argentina, human rights movements, catalyzed by repression in their own societies, challenged military governments’ self-depictions as guardians of their nations and Western values. The information generated by these advocates helped fuel emerging human rights movements in the United States and challenged Cold War policies that axiomatically supported these repressive regimes in the name of anti-communism. The Carter administration, influenced by debates generated in the Latin American context, formulated a human rights policy that sought to mitigate the harm done by U.S. Cold War intervention and support for right-wing allies.

Jeffrey Taffet wonders why U.S. activists responded so strongly to the Chilean coup and subsequent human rights abuses under Pinochet. Many of the early activists had been personally involved in Chile even before the coup, but its broader reach in U.S. politics was a result of U.S. citizens seeing Chile not just as a tragedy “over there,” but also a tragedy of U.S. power. The United States’ well-documented interference in Chilean politics since the 1960s, particularly its role in orchestrating the 1973 coup, made the problems of Cold War intervention and repressive allies particularly salient to a U.S. audience. A sense of U.S. complicity in and responsibility for the human rights crisis in Chile defined their activism.

Taffet is right that my intention was not to argue that Chile created this interest in human rights and prompted this questioning of U.S. Cold War policies. This reaction was only possible because of the human rights work that had preceded it. My work labels Chile as a “catalyst,” an accelerant of preexisting trends and activism rather than their genesis. Concerns about human rights clearly predate 1973, and other scholars have explored the origins of such concerns more ably and expansively than I could in the context of my work.

Indeed, one of my primary goals for this book was to reassess Carter in the broader context of 1970s human rights activism, particularly the activism that challenged the assumptions of U.S. Cold War power at home and abroad. This is, in part, what led to my project’s emphasis on the Southern Cone. Chile, as I noted above, took on an outsized role as it became emblematic of broader problems with U.S. power and Cold War paradigms of national security. The legacy of U.S. intervention throughout the hemisphere informed in critical ways the self-reflective elements of

the U.S. human rights policy that took shape at this time. The advocates I looked at time and again placed Chile at the center of their campaigns, but not because its human rights abuses were most egregious or because U.S. support for the junta was exceptional. Rather, the unprecedented revelations of the Church Committee as well as the dense activist networks disseminating information throughout the world made U.S. complicity in its abuses uniquely *visible*. That visibility revealed dynamics that often worked more subtly and less directly in U.S. relations with other countries, and it made connections between U.S. policies and foreign abuses perceptible to a broad audience.

For the left-liberal actors at the core of my project, it was this connection that gave moral urgency to their work in Chile, Argentina, and other “friendly” right-wing dictatorships. Abuses in the Soviet sphere, while certainly egregious, had not been materially supported and sustained by U.S. government policies. This logic also directed the Carter administration’s efforts to craft a human rights policy that prioritized areas that most implicated the United States in systems of repression.

Mateo Jarquin points out that Central America, particularly Nicaragua, came to occupy an important part of the Carter administration’s human rights agenda and embodied many of the dynamics at the core of my work. Central America was certainly important to the evolution of human rights policy during the Carter years, but I would argue that the Southern Cone was uniquely influential in establishing the working assumptions and mechanisms behind the policies, which started before Carter’s tenure. This is due in part to the politics of complicity and visibility of Chile I noted above, amplified by critical mass of Chilean and Argentine activists active in U.S. policy circles—a result of the politics of exile and expulsion that marked the Southern Cone dictatorships. Indeed, Debbie Sharnak’s work makes a compelling case for Uruguay being an important part of this early conversation.<sup>4</sup> Central American advocates would become similarly instrumental in U.S. political debates in the later years of the Carter administration and into the Reagan administration, but they were not as prominent in the first half of the decade.

Central America becomes important in ways the Carter administration did not anticipate, pushing human rights policy in new directions and raising new challenges. Close studies of how these dynamics unfolded in Nicaragua, as well as El Salvador and Guatemala, would undoubtedly lend much to the initial survey my book offers. The nuances and particularities of each case make it unwise to generalize, and I hope that other scholars will explore these cases in depth. I believe, however, that we will find that tensions resulting from the legacy of U.S. intervention in the region and the limits of U.S. power will remain familiar, even if the Carter administration and their local partners resolve these dilemmas differently in each case.

I would like to end by engaging with the contemporary implications of my study, which Thomas Field thoughtfully raises in his review. I see the 1970s construction of human rights as a uniquely self-critical moment for U.S. policymakers. My hope was that this study would call attention to this alternative model for U.S. human rights policy—one less dependent on intervention—and also engage with the tradeoffs involved in implementing these policies, and the limits of U.S. leverage to change the internal workings of other countries. I would argue that part of the United States’ struggle to develop successful human rights policies emanates from the belief that human rights abuses are something perpetrated by foreign governments and actors that the U.S. government needs to fix, rather than something that results from the intersection of local

Focusing on Latin America reveals that the notion of U.S. complicity in human rights abuses was essential in linking democracy and diplomacy in the 1970s.

particularities and an international system that the United States is part of and often helps to shape. U.S. human rights policies need to start by engaging the consequences of U.S. power, addressing areas where the United States is most embedded in the dynamics that enable and perpetuate abuses.

Further, it seems to me that we often fall into a no-win situation in conversations about where human rights fit into the U.S. foreign policy agenda. If human rights are corralled into understandings of the national interest, many are quick to dismiss them as “self-serving.” But excluding them from understandings of national interests sets up an inherent conflict between rights and “real interests.” I believe that my work shows that human rights policy does not necessarily entail a trade-off between morality and objectives like national security or economic development. But as with all interests, there are hard choices and moments when one issue will surpass another in importance. In this, human rights are not unique, but the universalist rhetoric that accompanies human rights often makes compromises unpalatable. We need to accept compromise and grapple with complexities in this as in all issues if we want to have viable policies.

Understanding limits and tradeoffs is important not only for policymakers but also for those outside of government who wish to see a more vigorous human rights policy implemented. *Principles and Power*, along with works by Kathryn Sikkink, Lauren Turek, Sarah Snyder, Patrick Kelly, Barbara Keys and others, reveals that non-government actors can play a decisive role in raising issues, mobilizing public opinion, offering information and expertise to frame policy, and creating bridges between international and domestic concerns. There is, of course, an unresolved tension here: advocacy, by definition, should be constantly

pushing policymakers to rethink what is possible and reshape priorities. But advocates also need an awareness of the dilemmas that their partners in government face so they can offer viable options that serve their agendas.

Do human rights matter at all, or are they a concept “fungible to the point of meaninglessness,” as Fields worries? It is easy to be cynical about human rights, and in exploring and studying these complexities and competing tensions, I have often felt a sense of pessimism creeping into my thinking. I have been heartened, however, by the people I had the privilege to talk to in the course of working on this project. Tex Harris, Joe Eldridge, José Zalaquett, Patricia Derian and others underscored for me that human rights policy does not have to be free of contradictions to have a positive impact on the lives of real people. We should not let the lack of easy answers deter us from holding our own governments accountable for their behaviors, confronting the shortcomings of U.S. power, and pushing for policies that help us secure human rights for more people and reflect our nations’ best values.

Notes:

1. Gilbert M. Joseph, “What We Now Know and Should Know: Bringing Latin America More Meaningfully into Cold War Studies,” in *In from the Cold: Latin America’s New Encounter with the Cold War*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser (Durham, NC, 2008), 3–46.
2. See Kathryn Sikkink, *Evidence for Hope: Making Human Rights Work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Princeton, 2017), 3–21, 55–93.
3. Robert McMahon, “Diplomatic History and Policy History: Finding Common Ground,” *Journal of Policy History* 17, no. 1 (2005): 97.
4. Debbie Sharnak, *Of Light and Struggle: The International Histories of Human Rights and Transitional Justice in Uruguay* (Philadelphia, PA, forthcoming).

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