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William Michael Schmidli. "Institutionalizing Human Rights in U.S. Foreign Policy: U.S.-Argentine Relations, 1976-1980." *Diplomatic History* 35:2 (April 2011): 351-378. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7709.2010.00951.x. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2010.00951.x>

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Review by **Sarah B. Snyder**, University College London

William Michael Schmidli's piece fits into growing attention by *Diplomatic History* to human rights as an issue in United States foreign policy. After David Schmitz and Vanessa Walker's January 2004 article on President Jimmy Carter's human rights policy, the issue was only addressed intermittently in book reviews and Bernath lectures until Barbara Keys' 2010 article on the establishment of human rights institutions in the State Department.¹ Yet, panels, conferences, and publications addressing human rights have proliferated elsewhere in recent years. The short passage of time between Keys' article and Schmidli's suggests this subfield is perhaps being accorded greater significance.

Schmidli's article contrasts United States policy toward Argentina under Gerald Ford and Carter and uses the comparison as a lens to illuminate a transformation in United States attention to human rights in its foreign policy. Schmidli situates his analysis in a broader discussion of United States policy toward Latin America during the Cold War, where, like many other critics, he highlights American anti-communism as weakening democratic institutions in these countries. He similarly examines the preceding decades of Argentine political history, which were highly unstable; not surprisingly given the priorities

¹ David F. 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 (January 2004): 113-143; and Barbara Keys, "Congress, Kissinger, and the Origins of Human Rights Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 34: 5 (November 2010), 823-851. The two Bernath lectures that addressed human rights most explicitly are Elizabeth Borgwardt, "Commerce and Complicity: Corporate Responsibility for Human Rights Abuses as a Legacy of Nuremberg," *Diplomatic History* 34: 4 (September 2010): 627-640; and Douglas Brinkley, "The Rising Stock of Jimmy Carter: The 'Hands on' Legacy of Our Thirty-ninth President," *Diplomatic History* 20:4 (October 1996): 505-530.

Schmidli has outlined, the United States repeatedly emphasized stability over democracy in Argentina.

In aftermath of the March 1976 coup, the Argentine military was particular concerned with its image in the United States and expressed interest in hiring a public relations firm to ensure positive relations. United States officials such as the ambassador in Buenos Aires under Ford, Robert C. Hill, noted positive steps by the Argentine military to prevent “letting human rights issues become an irritant in U.S.-Argentine relations.” Of course, as Schmidli points out using records for the Department of State’s Argentina Declassification Project, the military was focused on appearances rather than curbing the violence and executions that “would therefore probably be necessary” in the wake of the coup. (359) Schmidli presents Hill as a fascinating figure who evolves from a strong supporter of the Argentine leadership to one increasingly questioning human rights violations there and United States complicity in such abuses. As with many other accounts of United States human rights policy (or lack thereof) in this period, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger is the villain – the counterpoint to later Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Patricia Derian’s principled activism. Whereas Hill was raising the specter that the gross human abuses could harm relations with the United States, when Kissinger met with the Argentine Foreign Minister, he indicated that his concern was speed, saying, “The quicker you succeed the better.” Guzzetti promised to “clean up the problem” by the end of the year, which could be read as a “green light” to accelerating violations in Argentina. (362) Kissinger had completely undermined Hill’s attempts to moderate Argentine behavior and convinced the leadership in Buenos Aires that opposition to Argentine practices was limited to narrow segments of the United States government. This article derives from Schmidli’s Ph.D. dissertation, and hopefully we will learn more about Hill and his conversion to human rights in Schmidli’s future book.

Carter’s election and his appointment of Derian to be Coordinator and then Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs transformed the United States’ approach to Argentine human rights violations. Schmidli argues that the issue was a central focus of Derian’s tenure, beginning with a trip to Buenos Aires even before she had been confirmed by the Senate. In Schmidli’s view, the shift marked a “major—and unwanted—rupture with the previous three decades of U.S. Cold War foreign policy toward Latin America.” (353) Schmidli describes how Argentines, thwarted in their attempts to get answers from their own government about relatives who had “disappeared” turned to the United States for assistance, and depicts the steps the United States took under Derian’s leadership to address their cases.

Schmidli, however, analyzes more than the changes in U.S.-Argentine relations. He also more broadly evaluates efforts to institutionalize human rights into American diplomacy. In this highly positive account of the Carter administration’s human rights policy, Schmidli rightly sees the impetus for greater attention to human rights as coming from Congress; the issue was picked up by Carter during the presidential campaign and

incorporated into his foreign policy after he entered office.² Making use of a range of interview and congressional records, he demonstrates how White House support enabled members of Congress and their nongovernmental allies to pursue the “institutionalization of human rights in U.S. foreign policy.” (364) The arrival of the Carter administration offered new points of access and influence for nongovernmental organizations active on human rights, and Schmidli presents the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs as the center of a network of governmental and nongovernmental actors working together on human rights in Latin America.

Importantly for assessing the integration or institutionalization of attention to human rights as a priority in U.S. foreign policy, Schmidli notes that even with the weight of the White House rhetorically behind her efforts, Derian still faced bureaucratic resistance to her agenda within the State Department, the Pentagon, and the business community. In addition, as Schmidli acknowledges, the evidence that the United States played a role in changing human rights practices in Argentina is unclear. Further work is necessary to tell us if the institutionalization he describes led to more effective activism on human rights as well as the degree of this process. As Schmidli concedes, Carter had moderated his stance in the wake of the invasion of Afghanistan, which could be seen as a second tempering of his commitment, after the July 1977 adoption of a Presidential Review Memorandum that outlined a more circumscribed human rights policy than had been pursued initially.

An important question raised by Schmidli’s article is, how much did Carter and Derian institutionalize human rights into United States foreign policy if it was congressional actors that established the State Department bureau and prevented its elimination under Ronald Reagan? Schmidli’s work heralds not only new attention to the subfield by journals such as *Diplomatic History* but also difficult questions about the place of human rights in U.S. foreign policy.

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² In his sympathetic appraisal, Schmidli builds upon a more recent body of literature revising traditional accounts of Carter’s policy as misguided, inconsistent, ineffective, and harmful to American interests. See for example, Schmitz and Walker, “Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights;” and Brinkley, “The Rising Stock of Jimmy Carter.”

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