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**Michael Franczak. "Human Rights and Basic Needs: Jimmy Carter's North-South Dialogue, 1977-1981."** *Cold War History* 18:4 (2018): 447-464. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2018.1468437>.

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Review by **Debbie Sharnak**, Harvard University

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In the last few years, scholars have produced a variety of new scholarship on President Jimmy Carter's human rights agenda that analyzes previously overlooked aspects of his policy, ranging from issues of self-determination to riot control.<sup>1</sup> Michael Franczak's article, "Human rights and basic needs: Jimmy Carter's North-South Dialogue, 1977-81" is a welcome addition to this trend. Franczak looks at the social and economic part of Carter's human rights policy to understand how his administration's focus on basic needs in health, education, and nutrition were utilized as a way to reach out and strengthen relations with Third World nations.

Franczak argues that despite this earnest attempt to move beyond seeing developing nations as a theater for Cold War battles, the policy was ultimately a failure. The Carter administration's shortcomings are tied to the fact that part of stressing basic needs was prioritized as a way to eschew the Third World's New International Economic Order (NIEO)—a framework that sought to redistribute economic resources and political power from the global North to the global South—and ultimately saw structural changes in global system as the goal. Carter instead wanted to refocus discussions towards a less ambitious but humanitarian-based basic needs strategy that ultimately fell short in improving North-South relations.

Franczak starts his analysis by trying to understand where basic needs fit into Carter's overall human rights strategy in his first two years in office. As such, he analyzes Carter's foundational human rights memo, Presidential Review Memo (PRM)-28, and examines the role of the Overseas Development Council (ODC), a Washington DC-based think tank, in Carter's adoption of basic needs as a prime goal in North-South

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Daigle, "Beyond Camp David: Jimmy Carter: Palestinian Self-Determination, and Human Rights," *Diplomatic History* 42:5 (November 2018): 802-830; Javier Gil Guerrero, "Human Rights and Tear Gas: The Question of Carter Administration Officials Opposed to the Shaw," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43:3 (2016): 285-301; Barbara Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

relations. The second section traces how Carter began to put these ideas into practice, particularly in his, at first, harmonious relationship with Venezuela's president, Carlos Andrés Pérez, and eventually where the two began to diverge when Carter shied away from more transformative changes that Andrés Pérez supported.

The article then argues that in reevaluating how to make more headway in relations with Third World countries midway through his time in office, Carter began to include not only support for basic needs, but also technology transfers. Franczak contends, however, that this strategy ultimately failed to make much progress in international forums such as the UN Conference on Trade and Development and the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development meetings. Third World countries steadfastly supported structural reform, while the US likewise proved intransigent in supporting any sort of transformational NIEO-based change. In the end, although Carter came into office seeking to change the tenor of North-South relations, he ultimately proved unsuccessful. Carter was unwilling to negotiate on the global South's terms and the global South ultimately found Carter's offer of basic needs and technology transfer insufficient.

Using documents from Carter's presidential library, the State Department (primarily from newer *FRUS* volumes), and the UN, Franczak offers a new vantage point into high level negotiations between Carter and key leaders from the Third World during his time in office. While much of the focus on Carter's human rights policy has centered on his attempts or failures in stopping the most egregious human rights abuses, Franczak puts a spotlight on social and economic rights—an increasing salient issue in human rights scholarship.<sup>2</sup> While Franczak is not new in suggesting that the promotion of basic needs was linked to undermining the more ambitious NIEO platform (Samuel Moyn, for example, also makes this argument in his book, *Not Enough*), Franczak offers a close perspective on how these ideas intersected specifically within the Carter administration.<sup>3</sup>

The article also opens up an avenue for a host of other questions regarding Carter's focus on social and economic rights. First, it is unclear exactly how Carter sought to balance or prioritize social and economic rights within a broader human rights policy. Were they just a way to reach out to Third World nations or were they earnest articulations of his human rights framework—and if so, how was this debated or discussed within the administration? How did this strategy perhaps play out on a bilateral basis versus from the perspective of major international meetings? Indeed, part of the limitations of U.S. administrations' with Third World policies is often linked the tendency of American officials to see the Third World as a monolithic block, but the reader is left to wonder how basic needs got stressed in individual meetings with countries as well as in broader North-South dialogues.

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<sup>2</sup> Kenton Clymer, "Jimmy Carter, Human Rights, and Cambodia," *Diplomatic History* 27:2 (April 2003): 245-278; William M. Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere: Human Rights and U.S. Cold War Policy toward Argentina* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Moyn, *Human Rights in an Unequal World* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 121, 144. Whereas Moyn sees "a more fulsome embrace of basic needs against the background of his storied promotion of human rights," Franczak sees a more strategic, and arguably cynical, attempt to offer basic needs to replace the NIEO agenda.

Further, if this basic needs strategy was linked fundamentally to Carter's human rights policy, it would have been interesting to investigate how Pat Derian, from her office as the Assistant Secretary for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, weighed in on this debate. If she did not play a big role in formulating basic needs as a social and economic priority, that absence, itself, would indeed be notable as well.

Another fundamental question rests on wanting to know more about the Overseas Development Council (ODC) if it was indeed so foundational for Carter's thinking on this issue. As Franczak notes, the ODC began working with Carter in 1976, but I am curious as to whether it was because members of the organization were attracted to his campaign platform or because they saw an opportunity to influence a candidate? Did Carter reach out first to ODC because he admired their work and was thinking about these issues, or did they make contact first? Did the relationships between Carter and members of the ODC—such as Roger Hansen and Guy Erb—date back to a time before his candidacy and impact how Carter initially began to include human rights in his agenda? Fleshing out this relationship would help scholars to understand the intellectual history and influence on Carter's thinking on these issues.

Of particular note as well is Franczak's claim that Carter focused his human rights diplomacy on Latin America (451). Indeed, scholars of human rights tend to look at Carter's Latin America human rights focus from the perspective of Carter's policy towards the authoritarian regimes in Argentina and Chile.<sup>4</sup> Franczak, however, centers his analysis on the relationship between Carter and Venezuela and how Carter in many ways sought a partner in Pérez on a host of human rights issues in the region, ranging from the most egregious human rights abuses, to Organization of American States (OAS) commitments, and eventually pushing an economic rights perspective as well. Franczak seems to suggest that Carter's failure to reconcile his basic needs strategy with a broader human rights platform in Venezuela is indicative of his problem with other Third World countries, particularly in Latin America. One is left wondering however, how this relationship could be more nuanced, exploring perhaps how U.S.-Venezuela relations dealt with the contrast or contradiction between political and civil rights versus social and economic rights in conversations. Were they both seen as human rights or were they indeed seen as two different types of diplomatic conversations? Did working with Pérez on issues of torture and political imprisonment in the region also suffer during the latter part of his administration because of contrasts on the NIEO? How did Carter then perhaps reorient his partnerships in the region to continue to push a narrower human rights agenda? Examining Carter's human rights policy towards the region could indeed be much more nuanced and this section begs for further examination of the complexities of what this means particularly towards Latin America.

Overall, this is a wonderful article that should make scholars of human rights and international development excited about the forthcoming book manuscript which Franczak notes is also in the works. This article serves to open an avenue towards further research and debate about Carter's policies towards the Third World and offers readers a way to rethink the social and economic rights side of Carter's policy and particularly how it intersected with political power struggles throughout the globe.

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<sup>4</sup> Kathryn Sikkink, *Mixed Signals: U.S. Human Rights Policy and Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Vanessa Walker, *Ambivalent Allies: Advocates, Diplomats, and the Struggles for an 'American' Human Rights Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, forthcoming), Patrick William Kelly, *Sovereign Emergencies: Latin America and the Making of Global Human Rights Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

**Debbie Sharnak** is a Lecturer for the Committee on Degrees in History and Literature at Harvard University. She is working on a book manuscript entitled “*Of Light and Struggle in Uruguay: The Contested International History of Human Rights*” which examines the evolution of human rights discourse and the origins of transitional justice from the mid-1960s through the 1980s. Her work has been published in *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, *the Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, *TALLER*, and several edited volumes on topics such as U.S. foreign policy, Latin America, human rights, and transitional justice.

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