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The Carter Administration and the New International Economic Order

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Introduction

The narrative of international relations in the twentieth century indicates that economic interactions were strongly linked to the dynamics and relationships between developed and developing nations. The growth of the idea of complex interdependence among nations in the late 1970s, based on the work of researchers Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, challenged a global system based on United States hegemony. After World War II, the global economic order was defined by the Bretton Woods System, which benefited Northern nations, particularly the United States. However, the System, based on fixed exchange rates between currencies, all linked to the dollar, which was also tied to gold, proved ineffective as early as the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s, the collapse of the System highlighted the importance of international markets, while the 1973 energy crisis highlighted the interdependence between the Global North and the Global South. These events led developing countries to demand a more equitable economic system. In this context, it was hoped that they would have greater decision-making power in International Financial Institutions, sovereignty over the resources in their territories, global trade reform, technology transfer to promote self-reliant development and better redistribution of global wealth. Created in the 1960s as a completion to decolonization and formalized by United Nations General Assembly resolutions in 1974, the New International Economic Order project formed a key aspect of United States foreign policy in the 1970s.

The paper offers an in-depth analysis of the United States response to the NIEO. In particular, the research will focus on the response of the thirty-ninth President, Democrat Jimmy Carter, and his administration, which presented internally divergent views. The purpose of this thesis is to examine Carter's foreign policy in response to the NIEO, which is a policy based on human rights and meeting basic human needs for developing nations. However, as is pointed out in the paper, the issues and criticisms that emerged from his moral method were significant. First, the explanation of human rights presented by Carter in his inaugural address appeared vague. He identified three groups of human rights: civil and political rights, economic and social rights, and rights to the integrity of the person; however, through the analyses conducted by critics and scholars, the paper makes clear that, in reality, the administration favored the first group, giving rise to a moral selectivity that implicitly led to some rights being viewed as more legitimate to protect than others. The example of how Carter's foreign policy was applied in the paper concerns Latin

America, where it became clear that the protection of civil rights served to delegitimize and resist oppressive and adversarial political regimes. At the same time, the promotion of social and economic rights could have supported the demands for greater global wealth distribution advocated by Third World countries, which were in sharp disagreement with the United States perspective. In addition, internal differences within the Carter administration regarding the NIEO and relations with the Soviet Union, especially between his national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, critics said, would have made his foreign policy ineffective. The goal of this paper is to examine Carter's response to the human rights-based NIEO and demonstrate how that response is balanced between continuity and change compared to his Republican predecessors Nixon and Ford and his successor Reagan. To achieve this goal, the research questions are: how does the Carter administration respond to the NIEO? And how does its response to the NIEO differ or coincide with those of other administrations active from 1974 to 1980?

Although there is a vast amount of writing on the NIEO and Carter's foreign policy, studies that thoroughly examine the extent to which the expectations of the Global South have been met by the United States administration's reactions, particularly regarding North-South relations, are rare. The current situation regarding Carter and the NIEO is mainly based on two main and opposing theses. On the one hand, Carter is recognized as an individual authentically motivated by favorable ethical principles and eager to uphold human rights in developing countries; on the other hand, Carter is considered to have acted strategically, consciously or unconsciously, in relation to the response to the NIEO. One possible interpretation stemming from these theses states that Carter sincerely had a desire to make changes, however, he was not ready to accept the demands made by NIEO proponents. A second interpretation views Carter's human rights policy as a strategic approach to gain time, accumulate credibility in the Third World, and preserve the current economic order. The study uses a historical comparative method, analyzing both primary sources, such as official United Nations documents and presidential speeches, and secondary sources, highlighting similarities and differences.

The first chapter outlines the context in which the issue of inequality between the Global North and South manifests itself. It illustrates both the functioning of the system and its crisis, seeking to examine the situation of developing countries with respect to these two

phases. The chapter illustrates how the negative assessment of this economic System represented an opportunity, although also a challenge, for the Third World during its crisis in the early 1970s. Within the historical framework of the NIEO, it is also important to mention the 1973 oil crisis and the contribution of oil-producing countries in the NIEO request. Finally, we examine the Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order, along with the action plan for its implementation, and the Charter on the Economic Rights and Duties of States, paying attention to the needs of the Third World.

The second chapter focuses on the Carter administration's approach toward the NIEO. Initially, the actions of his predecessors, Nixon and Ford, regarding the NIEO are presented. The figure of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger proved crucial as his strategic approach toward the NIEO, which included an apparent openness toward the Third World to ensure stable relations and the maintenance of an economic order under United States control, formed the basis for foreign policy decisions in these administrations. Kissinger's view is contrasted with that of diplomat Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Analyzing original documents, the paper compares these two figures to highlight domestic conflict related to international policy. Next, it focuses on the human rights advocated by Carter, highlighting foreign policy strengths and weaknesses. In conclusion, policy differences concerning the NIEO within his own administration are illustrated to determine whether these differences limited his actions.

Finally, in the third chapter, the state of the art regarding Carter and the NIEO is examined to understand whether his response to the NIEO was motivated by altruistic intent or a more cynical strategy. An initial openness toward the Third World early in his term is highlighted, which was later superseded by geopolitical interests and national security considerations. The case of Latin America is then presented, analyzing the application of Carter's foreign policy, noting that it was realized as he designed only in that area. Finally, a theory relating Carter and Reagan is presented. Examining primary and secondary sources, the thesis argues for the existence of a connection, whether due to strategic or geopolitical motivations, between the two presidents. Specifically, the thesis asserts that Carter's foreign policy in the latter part of his term establishes the foundation for the rise of neoliberalism and the ultimate abandonment of the New International Economic Order.

Chapter 1

The New International Economic Order: Origins and Context

This first chapter outlines the context in which the issue of development and disparities between the global North and South manifest itself. In particular, it initially examines the Bretton Woods Economic and Monetary System in relation to the New International Economic Order, pointing out how the criticisms that emerged against this economic system provided an opportunity for development during its crisis in the early 1970s. Examining the disadvantaged situation of developing countries in the 1960s, it highlights the reasons that led the Third World to call for a New International Economic Order in 1974, although as will be pointed out, the process is to be considered longer. The last paragraph will then analyze the Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order (Resolution 3201 (S-VI)), together with the Program of Action for the Establishment of a New International Economic Order (Resolution 3202 (S-VI)), as well as Resolution 3281 (XXIX) containing the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States. It will be examined not only the economic and political aspects of the NIEO, but also the legal aspects, with particular emphasis on emerging critical issues. In conclusion, there will be a brief outline of the main reactions of developed countries to these resolutions, with a quick mention of the reaction of the United States, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

1. Bretton Woods at Work

When dealing with the international monetary system, it is useful to make a brief conceptual introduction. The international monetary system comes in two forms: an ideal and a material one. Although he does not refer to these specific terms, economist Barry Eichengreen in his volume “Globalizing Capital” explores this difference. It is pointed out that an international monetary system can exist in its concrete conditions before it is idealized and formalized. Eichengreen explains that, for various technical, political or strategic reasons (such as monetary exchange practices, crisis responses, *de facto* adoption of the gold standard, bimetallism and network externalities), even before 1880, monetary practices had been adopted without unified norms and a shared ideology

regarding the international system.¹ A modest idealism of the international system begins to emerge only after repeated coordination efforts among nations and after conferences, such as the Latin Monetary Union in 1878. Indeed, the author speaks of the emergence of a “consciousness of their interdependence.”² This premise is relevant because it helps to understand the importance of Bretton Woods in a material sense, since it represented an intentional, normative and institutional act.

Considering this brief introduction, the periodization of the international monetary system can be divided into four distinct phases. The first phase, which ran from 1880 to 1914, was characterized by the so-called classical gold standard; in this context, gold was used as the basis for monetary issuance, while at the same time its circulation as a currency declined, instead assuming a predominant role as a reserve. The second phase, between 1914 and 1944, represents a mixed phase, marked by stabilizations and crises. Indeed, after World War I, states attempted to stabilize their currencies. Some of them were successful, but this effort helped generate the conditions for the Great Depression of the 1930s and the subsequent fragmentation of the monetary system. The third phase, which ran from 1944 to 1971, was characterized by the Bretton Woods agreements, which established a gold exchange standard regime. Under this System, not only gold but also currencies convertible into gold could be used as monetary reserves: United States dollar was directly convertible into gold at a fixed rate of thirty-five dollars per ounce, while other currencies were pegged to the dollar with limited fluctuation margins. The need to expand reserves was due to the fact that gold was considered insufficient with respect to liquidity needs in a growing global economy, by limiting the use of gold exclusively as a reserve, its value would have increased excessively, generating a deflationary situation in which individuals would have less incentive to deposit funds in banks and there would be a reduction in investment. The last phase, extending from 1971, when President Richard Nixon announced the end of the Bretton Woods System, to the present day, is characterized by the adoption of flexible exchange rates.³

¹ B. Eichengreen, *Globalizing Capital: A History of the International Monetary System*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 15-16.

² B. Eichengreen, *Globalizing Capital*, p. 15.

³ The section is based on the periodization presented during the 29 March 2023 lecture of the International Economic History course, taught by Professor Giovanni Favero at Ca' Foscari University. See also: M. De Cecco, *The International Gold Standard: Money and Empire*, London, Frances Printer, 1984, p. 1-21.

The Bretton Woods System, established at the Bretton Woods conference of July 1944 and organized by the United States Treasury Department, represented a compromise between fixed exchange rates, typical of the gold standard and considered advantageous for the reconstruction of the global trade and financial network, and the greater flexibility, which countries adopted during the 1930s in order to restore and maintain domestic economic and financial stability.⁴ This compromise took the form of a synthesis between the British plan proposed by John Maynard Keynes to create a supranational central bank, called the International Clearing Union, and the United States plan organized by Harry Dexter White to establish a United Nations Stabilization Fund.⁵ The Bretton Woods System was established with the aim of avoiding the perceived problems of the interwar period, such as protectionism, currency wars, money flows and exchange rate instability; furthermore, it was intended to provide a framework of monetary and financial stability that would foster global economic growth and increased international trade.⁶ Although the System did not really come into effect until 1959, when Western European nations declared current account convertibility, and remained active until 1971, its economic impact was significant.⁷ The Bretton Woods System provided stability to the international monetary system after World War II, fostering a period of economic growth. Because it was based on fixed exchange rates against the dollar (gold convertibility), it thus ensured predictability of trade and monitoring of capital flows, avoiding the competitive crises of the 1930s. It also allowed states to implement social and welfare measures without compromising capital, thus supporting development and employment.⁸

The gold standard dollar-based system depended on the United States economy, which was characterized by restrained inflationary policies.⁹ It was developed to prevent the major preoccupations of the 1930s, however, as the System developed, issues regarding adjustment, confidence and liquidity arose, which were comparable to those faced by the gold exchange rate system during the interwar years.¹⁰ The System required that

⁴ M. D. Bordo, “The Operation and Demise of the Bretton Woods System; 1958 to 1971”, *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Series*, n. 23189, 2017, p. 3.

⁵ M. D. Bordo, “The Operation and Demise”, p. 3.

⁶ M. D. Bordo, “The Operation and Demise”, p. 3.

⁷ M. D. Bordo, “The Operation and Demise”, p. 3.

⁸ wsws.org (last consultation on 9 June 2025).

⁹ M. D. Bordo, “The Operation and Demise”, p. 2.

¹⁰ B. Eichengreen, *Globalizing Capital*, p. 91.

imbalances in the external accounts be corrected through symmetric adjustments in consumption and domestic prices. However, as European Central Bank member Lorenzo Bini Smaghi reported, it lacked an effective mechanism to enforce symmetry in the adjustment process.¹¹ After World War II, countries needed United States dollars to rebuild their economies. By the 1950s, thanks to expanding trade, countries such as Germany and Japan had begun to accumulate large current account surpluses and, therefore, dollars in the form of growing official reserves.¹² Therefore, the United States and other balance of payments deficit nations faced currency crises or recessions. Surplus nations, such as Japan and some European countries, on the other hand, were forced to control inflation by restricting dollar inflows.¹³ If the United States refused to provide dollars to other countries, trade would stagnate, and growth would be stifled. But if the United States did provide an unlimited supply of dollars, boosting growth and trade, confidence in its commitment to convert them into gold would be eroded.¹⁴ This imbalance and limitation of the Bretton Woods System suffered by the United States, known as Triffin's dilemma, was described and addressed by economist Robert Triffin in 1960. The deficit in the United States and the increasing surplus of dollars in other states led to a rush on United States gold reserves which could have negative effects on the world economy like deflation. Starting in 1965, United States inflation replaced deflation as the primary global economic concern. This change was mainly caused by Federal Reserve's expansionary policies which were put in place to fund the Vietnam War. In 1971 surplus nations that were worried about the dollar's stability started to convert their dollar deposits to gold because of the United States inflation.¹⁵ Then followed President Nixon's decision to stop this convertibility.

At the operational level, the system required each member to declare a face value of its currency in dollar terms, with the United States declaring the face value of the dollar to be thirty-five dollars per ounce of gold. The International Monetary Fund, which had been

¹¹ Speech by Lorenzo Bini Smaghi, Member of the Executive Board of the ECB, at the Conference on the International Monetary System: sustainability and reform proposals, marking the hundredth anniversary of Robert Triffin (1911-1993), at the Triffin International Foundation, Brussels, 3 October 2011.

¹² L. Bini Smaghi speech at the Conference on the International Monetary System, 3 October 2011.

¹³ M. D. Bordo, "The Operation and Demise", p. 25.

¹⁴ B. Eichengreen, *Exorbitant Privilege: The Rise and Fall of the Dollar*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 50.

¹⁵ M. D. Bordo, "The Operation and Demise", pp. 21-22.

launched during the Bretton Woods conference along with the World Bank as the two pillars of the new international financial system, consisted of several collections of national currencies and gold accumulated through a contribution paid by each country. The Fund required founding members to pay a quota which was equal to a subscription paid twenty-five percent in gold and the remaining seventy-five percent in national currencies. According to the Articles of Agreement, IMF members were required to peg their currencies to gold or the dollar, and any change in exchange rates had to be approved by the IMF, and only in the case of a “fundamental disequilibrium”¹⁶ in a country’s balance of payments, in order to avoid opportunistic exchange rate fluctuations.¹⁷ By allowing members to withdraw more gold than their initial quotas, the IMF was initially created as a credit union-style support instrument to assist member countries in the event of short-term current account deficits. However, as will be emphasized below, the System and its institutions have evolved differently from how the promoters of Bretton Woods envisioned it.¹⁸

The operation of the Bretton Woods System, which favored the Global North, brought out criticism and frustration among the less developed countries; but only later did it become clear that there was a specific “development” problem.¹⁹ In the early postwar decades, the developing world began to emerge on both the political and economic fronts. On the political front, development took shape through the dissolution of colonial regimes and the independence of former colonies. In fact, between 1960 and 1963, membership in the IMF increased from sixty-eight to one hundred and one states. Economically, developing states, or as they were commonly defined in the 1950s and 1960s underdeveloped or less developed states, aimed to build a material base capable of reducing economic dependence on imperial powers and meeting the new needs and expectations of the population. The trade and currency liberalization movement, led by the United States, peaked in the early 1960s in the developed world, leaving many poorer

¹⁶ International Monetary Fund, “Articles of Agreement of the International Monetary Fund”, Schedule C 6, 1944, p. 68. IMF.org.

¹⁷ I. O. C. Igwe, “History of the International Economy: The Bretton Woods System and its Impact on the Economic Development of Developing Countries”, *Athens Journal of Law*, vol. 4, n. 2, 2018, p. 111.

¹⁸ M. D. Bordo, “The Operation and Demise”, p. 4

¹⁹ H. James, “Development and Bretton Woods”, *International Monetary Cooperation Since Bretton Woods*, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 120.

nations eager for further reform.²⁰ This is the reason why scholars such as Giuliano Garavini, Adom Getachew and Umut Özsü, in reference to the New International Economic Order project, speak of a process aimed at completing decolonization, or the creation of an anticolonial world.²¹

According to Isaac Igwe, the Bretton Woods institutions implemented the creation of a system of indirect imperialism known as *pax americana*, which later formed the basis of the neocolonial era and lasted until 1970.²² The unstable and complex relationship between the Bretton Woods institutions and the Third World has frequently been emphasized and analyzed. The main reason for this complexity lies in the fact that the IMF and the World Bank are institutions led and dominated by Western powers, particularly the United States. A further problematic element concerns the minimal power of developing countries in the decision-making process within the institutions. Moreover, the IMF and World Bank had limited resources and powers and were under the control of Washington.²³

Igwe asserts that although the Bretton Woods institutions were established, as made explicit by John Maynard Keynes, primarily with the intent of pursuing “a common measure, a common standard, a common rule applicable to each and not irksome to any,”²⁴ the regulations embedded within these institutions turn out to be protectionist, asymmetrical and an obstacle to balanced economic development. The World Bank, the IMF and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade have tried to facilitate access to the System, but their efforts have not always been successful.²⁵ According to Igwe reports, the IMF and the World Bank have, in accordance with their Articles of Agreement, established a commitment to develop production facilities and resources in the less developed countries, as well as to promote balanced growth in international trade.

²⁰ H. James, “Development and Bretton Woods”, p. 122.

²¹ G. Garavini, “Completing Decolonization: The 1973 ‘Oil Shock’ and the Struggle for Economic Rights”, *The International History Review*, vol. 33, n. 3, 2011; A. Ghetachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2019, p. 9; U. Özsü, *Completing Humanity: The International Law of Decolonization, 1960–82*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2024, p. 239.

²² I. O. C. Igwe, “History of the International Economy”, pp. 117-118.

²³ I. O. C. Igwe, “History of the International Economy”, p. 121.

²⁴ J. M. Keynes speech at closing plenary session of the Bretton Woods Conference, 22 July 1944, in D. E. Moggridge (ed.), *Collected Writings of Keynes*, 1978, p. 103.

²⁵ H. James, “Development and Bretton Woods”, p. 123.

Moreover, the System was presented as a mechanism to facilitate the reconstruction of an economy destroyed in the post-conflict period and to stimulate international economic cooperation and mutual trust among all nations by strengthening global trade and financial regulation. However, in practice, there has been a pursuit of bilateral cooperation among developed countries on trade and financial regulation. Within the institutions, governance consists of the developed countries, which operate in the decision-making process with little or no consultation with developing countries, as the former are the main donors. Essentially, the higher a country's funding, the more decision-making role it has.²⁶

According to the goals and purposes set at its inception, the World Bank provides an important source of funding for Third World development through trade assistance. However, Igwe argues that the Third World has been deprived of its due funds by the owners of the institution, primarily the United States. Historian Duccio Basosi highlights how the NIEO project, despite its failure, had an impact on the Bretton Woods organizations. In particular, he highlights that, during Robert McNamara's presidency, the World Bank initially adopted ambitious development strategies; however, their failure fueled criticism from conservative circles, subsequently steering the institution toward a neoliberal direction. Nevertheless, McNamara expressed interest in some of the issues raised by the NIEO, such as the need to stabilize commodity prices.²⁷ It was not until 1960 that a concessional lending mechanism for the Third World was established with the support of the United Nations International Development Agency because of increasing pressure from the United Nations and developing countries. Indeed, while developing countries did not receive the development assistance promised by the World Bank, in contrast, the European and Japanese economic recovery benefited from United States investments and other protectionist concessions.

As for the IMF, the main purpose stated in the first Charter was to promote international monetary cooperation and exchange rate stability, facilitating the expansion and balanced growth of international trade, and provide short-term assistance to its members to enable them to correct maladjustments in their balance of payments without resorting to

²⁶ I. O. C. Igwe, "History of the International Economy", pp. 118-119.

²⁷ D. Basosi, "L'ONU e le Organizzazioni Economiche Internazionali di Fronte alla Sfida del Nuovo Ordine Economico Internazionale", in M. Mugnaini (ed.), *UN System: Temi e Problemi di Storia Internazionale*, FrancoAngeli, 2023, pp. 69-70.

measures destructive of national or international prosperity.²⁸ However, Igwe points out that assistance from this institution in the post-conflict period was also extremely limited.²⁹ Basosi noted that, in the 1970s, the IMF adapted only marginally to the demands coming from the Third World. The needs expressed by developing countries concerning governance were mostly neglected, although very modest increases in their shares were found.³⁰

Among the institutions of the Bretton Woods system, it is worth mentioning the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, an international treaty signed in 1947 in Geneva by twenty-three countries, with the intention of establishing a multilateral system of trade relations and promoting trade liberalization globally. Initially, the agreement was limited to industrialized countries, but during the 1960s it became more inclusive, growing to seventy-seven members by early 1971. One of GATT's first initiatives was an attempt to establish a permanent organization to regulate world trade, known as the International Trade Organization. The ITO was discussed during the United Nations Conference on Trade and Occupation, held in Havana between 1947 and 1948, but its establishment was blocked by the United States government. With the entry into force of the Uruguay Round agreements in Marrakesh in 1995, the World Trade Organization was established, which also took over the administration of the GATT. The WTO has been seen as the representative institution of global neoliberalism because of its binding and enforceable agreements on free trade and investment for all its members. Critics argue that its establishment represents an attack on the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. They also point out the strategy of this organization: on the one hand, it more efficiently manages trade rivalries within the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, while on the other hand, it contains the threat posed by Global South to the world economic order.³¹

According to Professor Harold James, the GATT sought to increasingly adapt to the specific needs of developing countries. James points out that Article 18 of the original Charter allowed developing countries to take protective measures, such as tariffs and

²⁸ IMF, "Articles of Agreement of the International Monetary Fund", Article I, 1944, p. 2. IMF.org.

²⁹ I. O. C. Igwe, "History of the International Economy", p. 119.

³⁰ D. Basosi, "L'ONU", pp. 68-69.

³¹ I. O. C. Igwe, "History of the International Economy", p. 120-121.

quantitative restrictions, to promote economic growth and improve living standards. If these measures proved insufficient, the Article provided special procedures to allow these countries to support emerging industries. In the context of this agreement, Article 37 required developed countries to undertake to reduce trade barriers for products of interest to developing countries and to avoid the adoption of new trade barriers or fiscal measures. However, in practice, the implementation of these commitments proved complex; the European member countries of the European Economic Community did not agree on a plan to remove restrictions contrary to the GATT. They instead formulated a new appendix to the agreement that made its contents more vague and less workable.³²

In summary, the Bretton Woods system differed from the gold-exchange standard in three main aspects that should have complemented each other. Fixed exchange rates became adjustable, provided certain circumstances were met. Controls were authorized to reduce international capital movements. The IMF was established to observe national economic policies and offer financial support to states at risk of balance of payments difficulties.³³ However, the three components of this triad did not operate completely harmoniously in reality. The adjustable exchange rate proved to be a contradictory idea: changes in parity, particularly by the industrial nations at the center of the System, were, as Smaghi stated, extremely infrequent. IMF supervision proved to be ineffective. The Fund's resources were soon insufficient compared to the amount of the postwar payments problem, and the currency scarcity clause, which was supposed to penalize countries whose policies endangered the stability of the System, was never enforced.³⁴

2. Bretton Woods Crisis

According to scholars, including the Economist Michael Bordo, problems for Bretton Woods began before the declaration of current account convertibility. In fact, one of the first problems that highlighted the limits of the Bretton Woods system was a series of speculative attacks on the members who had misaligned currencies, the first was the devaluation of the sterling in 1949 followed by the currencies of twenty-three other

³² H. James, "Development and Bretton Woods", p. 123.

³³ B. Eichengreen, *Globalizing Capital*, p. 91.

³⁴ B. Eichengreen, *Globalizing Capital*, p. 93.

countries. The United Kingdom, as the second largest reserve country, was subsequently under pressure from an overvaluation of the sterling which reflected slower productivity growth and higher inflation than its competitors. The IMF, the G10 and the Federal Reserve attempted to overcome the sterling crisis during the 1960s, but the attempts culminated in its devaluation and the effective end of the pound's role as a reserve currency in November 1967.³⁵ Professor Matias Vernengo also traces the causes of the decline of the Bretton Woods System to the 1950s and 1960s. As Bordo, also Vernengo argues that by 1950s was clear that the Bretton Woods system did not operate according to as envisaged.³⁶ According to Vernengo, in the 1960s, it was the limitations on capital mobility, and the push from the United States to liberalize capital flows that was central for the abandonment of the Bretton Woods system.³⁷

According to scholars, including Bordo, one of the major causes of the breakdown of the Bretton Woods System was the rise of inflation in the country that was supposed to be the pivot of the entire world economy, namely the United States.³⁸ Until 1965, Federal Reserve Chair William McChesney Martin managed to maintain low inflation. Moreover, he had placed importance on the balance of payments and the stock of United States monetary gold in his policy decisions. However, starting from that year Martin switched to an inflationary policy that continued through the early 1980s and became known as Great Inflation. In particular, the increase in the public deficit was a consequence of, on the one hand, the increasing spending on the Vietnam War and, on the other hand, President Johnson's Great Society policy. In all, the fear that the tight monetary policies needed to reduce inflation would lead to rising unemployment and a political backlash against the Federal Reserve made first Martin and then Arthur Burns, his successor, reluctant to stop inflation.³⁹ The depreciation of the currency then spread to the rest of the world and led to increased balance of payments surpluses in Germany and other countries.

³⁵ M. D. Bordo, "The Operation and Demise", p. 12.

³⁶ M. Vernengo, "The Consolidation of Dollar Hegemony After the Collapse of Bretton Woods: Bringing Power Back in", *Review of Political Economy*, vol. 33, n. 4, 2021, p. 530.

³⁷ M. Vernengo, "The Consolidation of Dollar Hegemony", p. 530.

³⁸ M. D. Bordo, "The Operation and Demise", p. 21.

³⁹ M. D. Bordo, "The Operation and Demise", p. 22.

Monetary authorities in Germany, as in other surplus countries, attempted to sterilize inflows, but failed to do so, resulting in growing inflationary pressure.⁴⁰

Another pressure on the international monetary system was world gold production, which stabilized in the mid-1960s and even declined in 1966. At the same time, private demand for gold increased, causing world stocks of monetary gold to decline. Consequently, United States put pressure on other monetary authorities to refrain from converting their holdings of dollars into gold. By this time, the international monetary system had morphed into a dollar standard system, although gold convertibility still mattered. The major industrial countries tacitly agreed to the American proposal not to convert their dollar liabilities into monetary gold, yet the threat of doing so was always present and heavy for the United States. The System also became a fixed exchange rate system due to the fear of the consequences of member countries changing exchange rates.⁴¹

The situation continued to worsen, by 1970 United States interest rates fell in response to a rapid monetary expansion, and the United States balance of payments deficit stood at nine billion of dollars. The deficit exploded to thirty billion in August 1971.⁴² The flood of dollars increased the reserves of surplus countries, foreshadowing inflation in Europe and Japan as well. President Nixon's decision to suspend gold convertibility on 15 August 1971, was provoked by French and British intentions to convert dollars into gold. This decision ended a key aspect of the Bretton Woods System. While the adjustable peg disappeared in March 1973.⁴³ On the 15 August 1971 Nixon not only closed the United States gold window to protect remaining gold reserves but also imposed a ten percent surcharge on all imports to force surplus countries to revalue their currencies and a ninety-day wage price freeze to control inflation. Bordo points out that President Nixon's attitude was to blame the rest of the world for the global situation and imbalances rather than focus on issues with domestic monetary and fiscal policies. According to him, Nixon administration was to increasingly blame the surplus countries for running large surpluses

⁴⁰ M. D. Bordo, "The Operation and Demise", p. 23.

⁴¹ M. D. Bordo, "The Operation and Demise", p. 23-24.

⁴² M. D. Bordo, "The Operation and Demise", p. 24.

⁴³ M. D. Bordo, "The Operation and Demise", pp. 21-26.

and deliberately undervaluing their currencies to gain a competitive advantage over the United States.⁴⁴

As developed countries with more advanced economies faced the consequences of the end of the Bretton Woods system and the complex problems of adjusting their currencies, the repercussions on poorer countries proved even more serious. The exchange rate volatility and inflation that afflicted developed nations resulted in extremely difficult economic conditions for developing countries, which relied on commodity exports and international financing. On the one hand, it can be considered a success that European countries, in the postwar period, were able to consolidate their recovery through institutions such as the Marshall Plan and the European Payments Union, which complemented the functions of the Bretton Woods institutions. On the other hand, however, the world's poorest countries continued to suffer from hunger and poverty. In addition, the failure of development strategies in many of these nations challenged the capacities of international financial institutions, making radical reforms necessary.⁴⁵ The issue of development and the differences between the North and the South remained present both during the period of the Bretton Woods regime and after its conclusion. However, the failure of the United States-dominated system constituted the "reason" for developing countries to call for a New International Economic Order.

Following the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, the IMF and the World Bank intensified their focus on developing countries, concentrating on loans based on the implementation of specific conditions. The Found had put in place long-term loans aimed at financing development, such as the Extended Fund in 1974 and the Structural Adjustment Fund in 1986.⁴⁶ At the same time, the World Bank, began lending for structural adjustment with the aim of supporting balances of payments, considering that many developing countries faced serious macroeconomic imbalances and an accumulation of external debt following the oil crises.⁴⁷ However, structural reforms and liberalization measures have failed to prevent a widespread slowdown in economic

⁴⁴ M. D. Bordo, "The Imbalances of the Bretton Woods System 1965 to 1973: U.S. Inflation, The Elephant in the Room", *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Series*, n. 25409, 2018, p. 14.

⁴⁵ J. You, "The Bretton Woods Institutions: Evolution, Reform and Change", in D. Held et H. S. Nielsen (ed.), *Governing Globalization*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 125.

⁴⁶ J. You, "The Bretton Woods Institutions", p. 9.

⁴⁷ D. Kapur, "The IMF: A Cure or a Curse?", *Foreign Policy*, n. 111, 1998, pp. 117-119.

growth and the rise of inflation in much of the world. As noted by the researcher Killick, the adjustment programs had rather limited effects on the economies of developing countries.⁴⁸ This situation entailed the loss of confidence in institutionally promoted structural adjustment measures, and a neoliberal vision emerged that aimed to reduce the role of the state in economic management. Consolidated in this contest was the vision of the *Washington Consensus*.⁴⁹ Two types of crises have marked the world economy in the era of neoliberalism also: a severe financial crisis that has affected many emerging economies and a chronic development crisis that has affected a significant portion of poor developing countries.⁵⁰ Unlike the first crisis, the chronic development crisis has not generated bold and effective proposals; this is also because politicians in industrialized countries have frequently remarked on the urgency of eradicating extreme poverty, which afflicts one-third of the world's population, but in practice little concrete action has been taken. As already pointed out, the Bretton Woods institutions failed to produce effective action plans to implement development in Third World countries.⁵¹ Their failure can be attributed to the lack of a system for stabilizing commodity prices; the absence of a plan to manage capital flows and technology transfer; and the inability to promote the policy and institutional changes necessary for development without compromising the sovereignty of states.⁵² Scholars Frances Stewart and Valpy FitzGerald conclude that the neoliberal adjustment policies promoted by the Bretton Woods institutions, and in particular IMF, have failed. Empirical evidence shows that in the majority of countries adopting Fund programmes in the 1980s and 1990s, per capita incomes have been falling, and poverty worsening. The 1980s was a decade in which most African and Latin

⁴⁸ T. Killick, *IMF Programmes in Developing Countries: Design and Impact*, London and New York, Routledge, 1995, p. 157.

⁴⁹ Economist John Williamson coined the term "Washington Consensus" in 1989, referring to a list of 10 economic reforms which he believed were widely accepted by most economists and institutions based in Washington (mainly the IMF, the WB and the US Treasury Department) to promote economic development in Latin American countries. See also: J. Marangos, "The Evolution of the Term 'Washington Consensus'", *Journal of Economic Surveys*, vol. 23, n. 2, 2009, p. 357.

⁵⁰ J. You, "The Bretton Woods Institutions", p. 13.

⁵¹ J. You, "The Bretton Woods Institutions", p. 32.

⁵² J. You, "The Bretton Woods Institutions", p. 33.

American countries were forced to borrow from the IMF. In both these regions average per capita incomes fell and poverty worsened significantly.⁵³

3. The Condition of Developing Countries in the 1960s and the Birth of the NIEO Idea

The liberal readjustment of the international monetary system, which emerged after World War II gave to the developed countries significant political and economic power. This power enabled them to influence and impose decisions that affected the entire global economy. As noted above, developing countries, located in Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America had limited decision-making power within Bretton Woods institutions, but were integrated into the world economic system primarily through the exploitation of their raw materials and the commodities they produce and export. The term exploitation in reference to North-South dynamics underlies the perspective of the leaders of the Global South. It relates to the historical meaning of the term that indicates the subordinate status of postcolonial nations in the global economic context. The term is related to “stronger legal claims to the ownership, control, and exploitation of the natural resources” in developing countries.⁵⁴ The basic idea is that the use of their own resources should be a sovereign right for developing countries and a necessity for their development. According to Özsü, this idea supported Algeria’s Foreign Minister Mohammed Bedjaoui’s call for the NIEO when he argued that:

“The Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States armed each state with the right ‘to exercise complete and permanent sovereignty over all its sources of wealth’ but also enjoined them ‘to respect the legitimate interests of other States as regards the exploitation of common natural resources.’”⁵⁵

It is crucial to point out that despite the claims that emerged as early as the 1960s as a result of this Western hegemony, as reported by professor Akinsaya, none of these less developed countries posed a serious challenge to the economic dominance of the West.

⁵³ F. Stewart and V. FitzGerald, “The IMF and the Global Economy: Implications for Developing Countries”, *Queen Elizabeth House Working Paper Series*, 1977, p. 21.

⁵⁴ U. Özsü, *Completing Humanity*, p. 112.

⁵⁵ U. Özsü, *Completing Humanity*, p. 115.

However, the limited participation of Third World nations in the decision-making process led to an unequal distribution of the world's resources and the development of dependent economies, generating further dissatisfaction with a system that shaped their economies but excluded them from management. In this context, the demand for the NIEO became increasingly evident.⁵⁶

Indeed, the global historical context of the 1970s, in which the NIEO negotiations began, was characterized by significant inequality. In this context, developing countries essentially made demands for changes in the rules and procedures governing economic relations between themselves and the industrialized countries. The main objective of the less developed countries was to reduce what was perceived as an ever-increasing gap between the living conditions of poor nations and those of rich nations. It is important to underline that the Third World constitutes seventy percent of the earth population and possess only the thirty percent of world health. That gap between the different parties was, in fact, substantial; the World Bank estimated that eight hundred million people lived in absolute poverty, lacking adequate food, housing, health care and access to education.⁵⁷

According to James, there are three theories that can explain the divergence in the development path between the Global North and South. The first of the reasons is situated in the realm of ideas and is a consequence of the application of a development theory that was judged to be inadequate.⁵⁸ Indeed, it was believed that development required a significant reduction in agricultural sectors and commodity production through manipulation of domestic prices in order to differentiate them from those on the world market. The second explanation concerns domestic political sociology: urban elites created political leverage by feeding prejudice against agriculture, arguing that it was necessary to promote development and modernization.⁵⁹ Finally, the third explanation relates to the international order itself. Certain aspects of the international system acted as deterrents to would-be members, such as the sharp fluctuation in commodity prices,

⁵⁶ A. Akinsanya et A. E. Davies, "Third World Quest for a New International Economic Order: An Overview", *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, vol. 33, n. 1, 1984, p. 208.

⁵⁷ J. A. Hart, "*The New International Economic Order: Cooperation and Conflict in North-South Economic Relations*", Macmillan Press, 1983, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁸ H. James, "Development and Bretton Woods", p. 122.

⁵⁹ H. James, "Development and Bretton Woods", p. 122.

especially in the first half of the 1950s, or more in the political aspect, the fear of outside influence and dependence.⁶⁰

James' rationale regarding the different paths of development complements the examination proposed by the professor Jeffrey Hart regarding inequality and the existing gap. According to Hart, in fact, there are different plausible theoretical explanations regarding the origins of the gap between rich and poor nations. Most of these explanations focus on institutions and practices that were established during the era of European colonialism; consequently, trade and colonization appear to be key components of these theories.⁶¹

The first theory is the Classical Free Trade Theory, which argues that each nation should specialize in exporting products for which it has a comparative advantage, namely those that can be produced through the use of more abundant and, therefore, cheaper resources. Free trade, according to this theory, maximizes global production and consumption; for this reason, it is proposed that governments should keep trade restrictions to a minimum. However, this approach has not been applicable to developing countries, as it ignores their colonial past and related practices, which have forced these nations to depend on commodity exports. Moreover, less developed countries have failed to develop an industrial sector precisely because of fluctuations in commodity prices. The second theory, known as the Terms of Trade theory, is associated with the ideas of Raúl Prebisch, director of the Economic Commission for Latin America. It argues that the economic gap between developed and developing countries can be traced to the fact that the former tends to export mainly manufacturing goods, while the latter specialize in exporting raw materials and agricultural goods, whose prices show a downward trend over time. Prebisch argues that at the root of this inequity is the phenomenon that although technological advances increase the productivity of manufacturing, the prices of industrial goods tend to remain stable. This is due to the protection exerted by rigid wages and monopolistic market structures present in the North. As a result, countries in the South, continuing to base their economies on the export of raw materials, are experiencing progressive economic deterioration. The third and final theory is the Dependency Theory,

⁶⁰ H. James, "Development and Bretton Woods", p. 123.

⁶¹ J. A. Hart, "The New International Economic Order", p. 4.

which argues that the growth of developing economies is conditioned and controlled by the industrialized countries that prevent the possibility of independent growth. However, in 1973, some developing countries opposed this form of structural dependence. The member countries of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries developed a new model of development through higher oil prices, thus succeeding in gaining an economic advantage. Nevertheless, this model later revealed its limitations, as higher oil prices contributed to worsening inequalities within developing countries, without leading to significant social or political improvements.⁶²

Inequities between developing and developed countries began to appear in the 1960s, as a result of the latter's boom in production and exports, which helped improve the living conditions of its citizens. At the same time, developing countries, whose economies depended mainly on the export of a few products, were struggling to cope with the massive population growth. Historian Giuliano Garavini also argues that although Western countries became increasingly significant importers of raw materials, and that, as a result, Third World countries' production and exports of goods increased significantly in the 1950s and 1960s, this growth did not directly lead to increased incomes in producing countries because of the decline in the terms of trade for raw materials in the period following World War II.⁶³

For these reasons, in September 1966, Senegal's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Doudou Thiam, delivered a speech at the opening of the first session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York that highlighted the growing inequities and urged the achievement of a concrete right to development. Thiam highlighted how the achievement of political and legal sovereignty by former colonized countries had not resolved the power imbalance that existed between the developed and developing worlds. In his statements, Thiam also identified the main issue as the deterioration of the terms of trade. During his speech, he urged the Third World to reaffirm its right to development by making it concrete and tangible, especially at the social and economic levels. In general, demands for rights are closely linked to demands for justice, and in the context of the right to development, they are closely linked to economic justice. The right to development, for

⁶² J. A. Hart, "The New International Economic Order", pp. 5-12.

⁶³ G. Garavini, "Completing Decolonization: The 1973 'Oil Shock' and the Struggle for Economic Rights", *The International History Review*, vol. 33, n. 3, 2011, pp. 475-476.

Thiam, essentially referred to the right to self-determination and its economic dimension, as well as the right to sovereignty over natural resources. This concept had inspired many leaders within the Group of 77, who shaped the demands for a new economic order in the 1960s and early 1970s. However, some scholars, including Professor Daniel Whelan, observe that, paradoxically, while rhetoric related to the right to development grew and gained increasing numbers of supporters during several UNCTAD conferences, the concluding documents of those meetings failed to solidly integrate the principles expressed.⁶⁴

In the early 1960s, Third World countries began to raise claims against the injustices existing between the North and the South, asserting their vision of international law and human rights, and initiating a development strategy that most frequently relied on state intervention and the pursuit of accelerated industrialization.⁶⁵ However, the gap continued to widen, and Thiam's speech in September 1966 represented a reaction to the failure to achieve the goals set in the early 1960s by the United Nations General Assembly, which had unanimously declared a Decade of Development for the Third World. This initiative called for the less developed countries to receive assistance to achieve an annual growth of five percent of total national income through increased international trade, accompanied by an annual flow of international assistance and capital equal to one percent of the national income of developed countries.⁶⁶ According to Garavini, the Decade of Development was not merely a slogan of the United Nations but also constituted a United States strategy aimed at countering international communism through aid policies and by stimulating growth in developing countries.⁶⁷

What, then, were the demands of the Third World that led to the formulation of the NIEO proposal? These quests can be traced to the work of Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch, who took over as head of the Economic Commission for Latin America in the late 1940s and then became the founding secretary-general of the UNCTAD in the early 1960s. Prebisch distinguished himself as a pioneer in the claim that the terms of trade between

⁶⁴ D. J. Whelan, "'Under the Aegis of Man': The Right to Development and the Origins of the New International Economic Order", *Humanity Journal*, vol. 6, n. 1, 2015, pp. 93-95.

⁶⁵ G. Garavini, "Completing Decolonization", p. 475.

⁶⁶ A. Akinsanya et A. E. Davies, "Third World Quest", p. 209.

⁶⁷ G. Garavini, "Completing Decolonization", p. 474.

commodity producers and manufacturers would deteriorate over time. Prebisch's thesis not only denounced the condition of structural dependence and subordination to which the imperial powers had historically relegated their colonies but also proposed a solution: to manage international trade in such a way as to prevent the deterioration of the terms of trade. In essence, Northern governments and businesses would have to be incentivized to provide capital, technology and skills to enable the South to develop its industrial base. As noted above, Prebisch's thesis forms the basis of dependency theory and provides the rationale for industrialization strategies through import substitution, as well as the needs exemplified by the NIEO.⁶⁸

Prebisch's critique of GATT operations, which proved to be beneficial only to developed countries, is a central theme of his work, which is widely accepted in economic and historical literature. As early as 1984, economists Akinsanya and Davies argued that Prebisch's proposed program aimed to promote concessions by developed countries and to establish a system of compensatory financing, through which capital subsidies would be provided to developing countries in the event of declining foreign exchange earnings due to commodity price fluctuations in the international market. Finally, Prebisch urged that a united front be maintained by developing countries in order to create political pressure in relations with developed nations. This thesis, which advocates a complete and radical departure from the current global order governing economic relations, has received widespread support within the United Nations system, particularly from the UNCTAD, which, since 1964, has been one of the forums used by developing countries to formulate and promote the various economic claims of the NIEO.⁶⁹ Later historians, such as Garavini, have also supported this thesis. Prebisch's proposal, which advocates the need for a clean break from the current world economic order, has gained wide support within the United Nations organization, particularly the primary objective of the first UNCTAD conference, held in Geneva, was to promote a radical reform of the GATT, which had already been the subject of criticism by Latin American countries during the previous negotiations on the Havana Charter in 1948.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ N. Gilman, "The New International Economic Order: A Reintroduction", *Humanity Journal*, vol. 6, n. 1, 2015, p. 3.

⁶⁹ A. Akinsanya et A. E. Davies, "Third World Quest", p. 209.

⁷⁰ G. Garavini, "Completing Decolonization", p. 475.

A significant acceleration in Third World aspirations was caused by the 1973 oil crisis, exacerbated by the actions of OPEC members. 1973 turned out to be the year of the Global South and of cooperation between oil producers and the rest of the developing countries. The main reason for the positive outcome of this event was the decision of OPEC member countries to quadruple the price of crude oil between October and December 1973. This episode was perceived as a genuine shock in the developed countries, while the producing countries experienced it as a just revolution and a victory against the technological and economic superiority of the developed nations. Non-oil-producing developing countries welcomed this revolution, showing solidarity with the producing countries, although this decision had negative repercussions on their balance of trade. Although, as pointed out, as early as the 1960s the slogans of the fight against imperialism and the right to development had reached a wide audience, mainly through the actions of youth movements and non-governmental organizations, in 1973 the Third World was able to emancipate itself and gain the negotiating power that enabled it to make claims.⁷¹

4. Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries Contribution

OPEC was established during the Baghdad conference in September 1960, with founding members represented by Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, and Kuwait. In the 1960s, the international oil market was dominated by consumers and international oil companies, mainly located in the Global North, which were able to keep crude prices low due to large imports.

Among the countries that joined OPEC was Algeria, which was in a special position compared to the other members of the organization regarding the export of its oil. The Algerian government, led by Boumediene, played a key role in the move toward a NIEO. Unlike other Middle Eastern countries, Algeria did not exploit its oil through concessions to large oil companies, but managed the resources according to the 1962 Evian Accords, directly under the control of the French state. In return, this management was supposed to promote the country's economic development.⁷² Houari Boumediene became President

⁷¹ G. Garavini, "From Boumedieneconomics to Reaganomics: Algeria, OPEC, and the International Struggle for Economic Equality", *The International History Review*, vol. 6, n. 1, 2015, pp. 79-80.

⁷² G. Garavini, "From Boumedieneconomics to Reaganomics", pp. 81-82.

of Algeria in June 1965 with the ambition of creating a robust national industry focused on the extractive and petrochemical sectors. The first step taken by his government was to revise the Franco-Algerian agreement concerning oil and gas, achieving greater autonomy for Algeria. This new agreement marked a significant change from the previous economic dependence on France. During 1967, two key events marked Boumediene's foreign policy: first, the outbreak of the Six-Day War, which saw the Algerian government siding with the Arab countries Egypt, Syria, and Jordan against Israel; and second, his presidency of the G77 conference in Algiers, preparatory for UNCTAD II. During his opening speech, Boumediene asserted that stabilization of commodity prices would only be beneficial if Third World countries gained direct control over productive industry. Thus, the main objective was to recover land resources and develop industries that could process raw materials locally. In February 1971, Algeria nationalized fifty-one percent of the French oil and gas industry, thus becoming the first OPEC member country to successfully complete such an operation. After this milestone, the Algerian government focused on raising and stabilizing commodity and commodity prices in the global economy, with the intention of transferring wealth and technology to the Global South.

Alongside G77, which was established in 1964 at UNCTAD I, the Non-Aligned Movement was another tool to pursue political independence and change the terms of trade in favor of the Global South. During the NAM summit in September 1973 in the Algerian capital, Boumediene succeeded in focusing the movement's attention on the struggle against economic neocolonialism, highlighting the importance of nationalization and fair prices for raw materials. In early 1974, while still holding the presidency of the NAM, Boumediene called for the convening of the sixth special session of the United Nations General Assembly, the first entirely devoted to economic issues. At this session, the NIEO was approved.⁷³

The third UNCTAD conference was held in Santiago, Chile, in 1972. On this occasion, too, most of the Third World delegations expressed severe criticism of multinational corporations, advocating and supporting the nationalization of extractive industries. In addition, strong concerns were expressed about President Nixon's decision to decrease the value of commodities expressed in dollars. It is worth noting that UNCTAD III led to

⁷³ G. Garavini, "From Boumedieneconomics to Reaganomics", pp. 82-86.

an agreement to create a commission, headed by Mexican President Luis Echeverría, to draft the “Charter of the Economic Rights and Duties of States,” which would definitively affirm the right to nationalization.⁷⁴

According to the study conducted by Garavini, the rise in oil prices made by OPEC member countries began even before 1973 and had multiple causes. These included the conclusion of the Bretton Woods System and the need to counter the depreciation of the dollar; the exceptional increase in the prices of all commodities; aspirations for nationalization by oil-producing developing countries, as well as fears of natural resource depletion; oil scarcity; and finally, a growing interest in environmental issues. In essence, the social and economic progress of the developed countries, which were at the peak of their economic and industrial growth in the 1960s, led to an increase in demand for raw materials and subsequently an increase in spending, generating global inflation.⁷⁵

The measures taken by OPEC and the subsequent oil shock highlighted the vulnerabilities of the international economic system and the dependence of industrialized countries on energy resources from the Global South. This situation has given commodity-producing countries greater bargaining strength in their demands for a new economic order. Increasing economic inequality and the collective consciousness of developing countries led to the formulation of demands related to the NIEO, particularly concerning sovereignty over natural resources, increased and stabilized prices of exported commodities, technology transfer to pursue self-sustaining industrialization, and reform of international institutions that favor developed countries.

The redistribution of the global payment surplus and deficit caused by the oil price increases established by OPEC was one of the main effects desired by member countries, significantly altering the distribution of power in the international monetary system. Higher oil prices continued for the entire decade, leading to an increase in the surplus payments of the major oil exporters, which increased from six point five billion dollars in 1973 to sixty-seven point eight billion in 1974. At the same time, this considerable OPEC surplus generated a deficit for almost all other countries. The industrialized countries, in fact, went from a deficit of nine point eight billion to one of thirteen billion,

⁷⁴ G. Garavini, “Completing Decolonization”, p. 478.

⁷⁵ G. Garavini, “Completing Decolonization”, p. 481.

but by 1975 they began to recover rapidly. However, the heaviest consequences of OPEC's decisions fell on developing countries without crude oil exports, whose deficit increased from eleven point three billion in 1973 to twenty-nine point nine billion in 1974.⁷⁶

Non-oil-producing developing countries, despite the importance of OPEC's decisions in negative terms, have cooperated with the organization's member states, sharing the goal of promoting national development and achieving economic independence. In addition, OPEC members recognized the need to gain political support from other developing countries in order to avoid pressure from the West regarding lower prices. It is a priority to highlight that the main link between OPEC and the rest of the Group of 77 was Algeria. President Boumediene, since the early 1970s, has exerted significant influence within the Arab world and the Non-Aligned Movement, promoting the creation of a new international economic order. In addition, Algeria initiated a series of nationalizations in the oil sector in 1971 and pursued a strategy geared toward autonomous industrialization.

Another significant link between OPEC and non-oil-producing developing countries is Manuel Pérez Guerrero, a Venezuelan who served as UNCTAD Secretary General in 1973, as well as a former Minister of Petroleum. Already in early 1973, Venezuela, as an oil producer and central nation in Latin America, was beginning to move closer and closer to the NAM, as the latter was changing its focus of intervention from a position of neutralism during the Cold War to a greater focus on economic issues in the global South. During the fourth NAM summit, held in September 1973, Algerian leader Boumediene brought to the Movement's attention the need to fight against economic neocolonialism, urging the convening of the sixth special session of the United Nations General Assembly for the year 1974.

In conclusion, it is argued that the oil shock did not originate in 1973 and was not caused by OPEC, but rather began a decade earlier, as a result of pressure from developing countries that, following decolonization, sought to reconcile political independence with economic independence. It was also the result of a series of events exogenous to the previously mentioned Arab world. The year 1973 represented, essentially, the culmination of this contention, in which oil producers and Third World nations coalesced to achieve

⁷⁶ J. A. Hart, "The New International Economic Order", pp. 17.

common goals, resulting in demands for a new international economic order. However, despite the approval of the Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order, the Program of Action and the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States, as Garavini points out, there was no structural change in the functioning of international economic institutions, no significant redistribution of wealth to the Third World, and no agreement on the restructuring of international debt. More importantly, no international organization was established for the management of raw materials, as demanded by Third World countries.⁷⁷

It is essential to mention a parallel organization to OPEC that had a significant impact in 1973: the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries. OAPEC, composed of Arab oil-exporting countries, acted primarily in response to the Arab-Israeli conflict by imposing an embargo on oil exports to the United States and other countries allied with Israel. However, this embargo had limited impact, as it was easily circumvented through the reallocation of oil supplies. More impactful was the decision by some Arab countries to gradually reduce oil production in order to exert political pressure. However, the rise in crude oil prices was mainly driven by OPEC, which intervened in response to the devaluation of the dollar, the collapse of the gold-dollar system, and the producer countries' desire to exert greater control over their resources.⁷⁸ The reason for focusing exclusively on OPEC in this paper lies in the fact that its decisions were directly embedded in global economic dynamics and Third World demands for a New International Economic Order.

5. From Proposal to the 1974 United Nations Resolutions

Protests by developing countries concerning the gap between the Global North and South, which had emerged since the 1950s, began to materialize during UNCTAD I in 1964, and peaked during the summit of NAM held in Algiers in 1973. Subsequently, these demands were formalized in the Declaration for the Establishment of a New International

⁷⁷ G. Garavini, "Completing Decolonization", p. 481-484.

⁷⁸ D. Basosi et G. Garavini, "La Rivoluzione del Petrolio: Miti e Realtà Dello «Shock Petrolifero» del 1973", in M. Bucarelli, D. De Luca, S. Labbate (eds.), *Gli shock petroliferi degli anni Settanta*, FrancoAngeli, 2025, pp. 55-58.

Economic Order, adopted at the Sixth Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on the 1st of May 1974 at the New York headquarters. The Declaration included proposals for amendment, which were urged by developing countries in various international forums. On 12 December of that year, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Charter of Rights and Duties of States with one hundred and twenty votes in favor, six against (Belgium, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, Luxembourg, the United Kingdom and the United States) and ten abstentions (Austria, Canada, France, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain). The Charter proposed by Mexican President Echeverría in 1972, had the intent of outlining the basic norms on which to build a more equitable international economic order.

The Charter consists of thirty-four articles divided into four chapters. The first chapter deals with the foundations of international economic relations, in which there is a set of principles for economic and political relations, including sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of states; the sovereign equality of all states; the resolution of injustices caused by force that deprive a nation of the natural means necessary for its normal development; and international cooperation for development. The second chapter includes articles one through twenty-eight, which establish the rights and duties of states. The third chapter contains two articles concerning common responsibilities to the international community. Finally, the last chapter, consisting of four articles, contains the final provisions.

The United Nations has been used by developing countries as a platform for the discussion of their economic and political claims. Through such use, significant instruments have been established such as the First United Nations Decade of Development, the UNCTAD, the Special Committee on Trade Preferences, and the Second United Nations Decade of Development. As previously pointed out, despite the implementation of these programs, the economic gap between developing and developed countries has shown no signs of narrowing. This has fueled a desire in developing countries to obtain a legally binding commitment from developed countries regarding specific economic rights and duties aimed at supporting world economies. Accepting the proposal of President Echeverría, UNCTAD III decided on 18 May 1972, to establish a working group, with ninety votes in favor, zero against and nineteen abstentions, including the United States. This working group will be tasked with drafting a charter

based on the principles previously approved by UNCTAD I, the principles of the Algiers Charter, the Declaration, the principles of the Lima Program of Action, and relevant UN resolutions, including the second Decade of Development of 1970. The working group was to meet a few times before submitting the drafted Charter to the United Nations General Assembly. At an initial meeting of the group, the President, Mexican Ambassador Castañeda, stated that the purpose of the Charter is to set out the rights and duties of states, which should be binding as they represent principles of a universal nature. He also emphasized that for the Charter to be effective, the principles contained in it must be accepted by the major states.⁷⁹

Despite the United States abstention from the vote on the UNCTAD resolution on the establishment of a working group on the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States, the United States has been watching the group very closely. The United States Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, immediately adopted a strategy of apparent openness to requests from the developing world, promising to seriously examine the proposals contained in the Charter and to ensure continued United States participation in the group. However, Kissinger emphasized that the rights and duties expressed in the document should reflect the aspirations of all nations, considering the concerns expressed by industrialized countries. Subsequently, the United States vote on the presentation of the draft Charter to the United Nations General Assembly was negative. In fact, the United States government felt that the draft Charter was unbalanced and discouraged harmonious economic relations between countries, limiting the flow of capital and, consequently, development. Furthermore, United States representatives expressed concerns about making the principles of the Charter legally binding on states. They expressed reservations because they felt that states were not ready to give up the degree of sovereignty and accept such legal commitments. Nevertheless, the Charter was adopted on 12 December 1974; however, its binding nature was not implemented.⁸⁰

In addition to the fact that the United States and five other world economic powers voted against the adoption of the Charter in December 1974, the non-binding nature of this document is further underlined by the fact that, being a resolution of the United Nation

⁷⁹ C. N. Brower et J. B. Tepe, "The Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States: A Reflection or Rejection of International Law?", *The International Lawyer*, vol. 9, n. 2, 1975, pp. 296-297.

⁸⁰ C. N. Brower et J. B. Tepe, "The Charter", pp. 299-300.

General Assembly and not a multilateral convention or treaty, it will, in any case, only have the force of a moral recommendation and not a legal one. Developing countries, which are unable to obtain binding agreements with developed countries, see the Charter as a means of creating international support for principles that have not yet been integrated into international law. However, as pointed out by Judge Brower, the weakness of the Charter lies in its general lack of a clear statement regarding whether states' economic rights and duties are subject to international law. In his study, Brower highlights the uncertainty and ambiguity of the Charter's language, elements that contribute to making it susceptible to different interpretations and non-binding. To this end, an illustrative case is given: paragraph j of Chapter I states that: "Economic as well as political and other relations between States shall be governed, *inter alia*, by the following principles: good faith performance of international obligations." Brower points out how the term 'international obligation' opens wide interpretation, not clarifying whether it refers only to freely accepted contractual obligations or instead embraces the entire body of international law.⁸¹

Other scholars, such as Akinsanya and Davies, assert that the Charter on the Economic Rights and Duties of States reiterated some of the provisions contained in the Declaration and Program of Action, giving those provisions a kind of legal force not only in terms of language but also in terms of content. Acknowledging the Charter's generalized language, they point out that it called on the international community to accept higher prices and the notion of cartelization, as well as to promote cooperation between developed and developing countries in international economic relations.⁸² The goal of creating, through the Charter, a legal framework that supports the ambitious goals of the NIEO is emphasized in the work of the Professor Antony Anghie. Anghie argues that the Charter is intended to be a concretization of fundamental principles of international law, such as sovereignty, non-intervention, and prohibition of the use of force, outlined in Chapter I. These principles are followed by articles that can be interpreted as an elaboration of the legal and economic framework derived from the same international principles. Anghie goes on to argue that the Third World adopted a strategy for the reform of international law, which used its majority within the United Nations General Assembly to create

⁸¹ C. N. Brower et J. B. Tepe, "The Charter", p. 303.

⁸² A. Akinsanya et A. E. Davies, "Third World Quest", p. 212.

resolutions, such as the NIEO and the Charter on Economic Rights and Duties of States. Notably, the principles contained within these resolutions were nothing more than an elaboration of the already existing basic principles of sovereignty. Moreover, these resolutions were based on a pre-existing legal framework and drew special legitimacy from the fact that they were approved by large majorities.⁸³

Scholars, in analyzing the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States, draw attention to Article 2, which is a milestone in the international obligation of states to respect the exclusive sovereignty of others with respect to property located in the territory of the latter. Specifically, point c of Article 2 states that each state has the right:

“To nationalize, expropriate or transfer ownership of foreign property, in which case appropriate compensation should be paid by the State adopting such measures, taking into account its relevant laws and regulations and all circumstances that the State considers pertinent. In any case where the question of compensation gives rise to a controversy, it shall be settled under the domestic law of the nationalizing State and by its tribunals, unless it is freely and mutually agreed by all States concerned that other peaceful means be sought on the basis of the sovereign equality of States and in accordance with the principle of free choice of means.”⁸⁴

With this article, developing countries aimed to strengthen their sovereignty as opposed to the current international order that tended to favor the Western world; as a result, developed countries, particularly the United States, opposed this article. However, Akinsanya and Davies point out that Third World nations never denied the value of foreign investment in their territories in their path to progress, but rather lamented the absence of a right that would allow them to take measures if the investors' interests were in sharp contrast and disadvantageous to the state. For these reasons, developing countries have proposed, in the event of violation of their right to own resources within their territory, to seek compensation from the state.⁸⁵ Instead, Brower emphasizing the weakness of the Charter, points out that the state's only obligation, preceded by an uncertain and non-binding “should,” is to grant such compensation if subjectively deemed

⁸³ A. Anghie, “Legal Aspects of the New International Economic Order”, *Humanity Journal*, vol. 6, n. 1, 2015, pp. 147-149.

⁸⁴ United Nations General Assembly, “Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States General Assembly resolution 3281 (XXIX)”, Chapter 2 Article 2, 1974. [UN.org](http://www.un.org).

⁸⁵ A. Akinsanya et al. E. Davies, “Third World Quest”, p. 213.

“appropriate,” considering only local law and “circumstances” in which international law does not necessarily present itself as “relevant.”⁸⁶ In this regard, Anghie points out that although the right of a state to nationalize an industry has not given rise to controversy, on the other hand, no consensus has been reached between developed and developing states on the question of whether a form of compensation should be recognized in cases of expropriation, nor on what criteria should be adopted for its assessment.⁸⁷

Following an in-depth analysis of the content of the Charter and related issues in the legal sphere, the Declaration on the NIEO and its Program of Action, with particular attention to economic, political and legal aspects, is essential. The common thread that binds scholars of the NIEO is an awareness of its threefold nature: economic, political and legal. As has been shown, the Charter was intended to provide the legal framework for the NIEO project, while the Declaration and Program of Action dealt with the other aspects.

In particular, the NIEO Declaration called for: an absolute right of states to control the extraction and marketing of their domestic natural resources; the establishment and recognition of stage-managed resource cartels to stabilize (and raise) commodity prices; the regulation of transnational corporations; no-strings-attached technology transfers from North to South; the granting of preferential (nonreciprocal) trade preferences to countries in the South; and the forgiveness of certain debts that states in the South owed to the North. Together, all these proposals amounted to an assertion of the “economic sovereignty” of postcolonial states.⁸⁸

United States Ambassador to Uganda Clarence Ferguson highlighted the most important principles NIEO Program of Action. The primary demand from developing countries involved the establishment of a special United Nations fund designed to support those most affected by general economic unrest, in other words, the poorest of the poor. The United States opposed this request, arguing that this task was incumbent on and was already performed by the World Bank. A further point raised by Third World countries concerned participation in the international institutions on the basis of the one state-one vote criteria. The third proposal outlined in the action plan concerned technology transfer.

⁸⁶ C. N. Brower et J. B. Tepe, “The Charter”, p. 305.

⁸⁷ A. Anghie, “Legal Aspects”, p. 150.

⁸⁸ N. Gilman, “The New International Economic Order”, p. 3.

Developing countries recognized that modern technology from developed countries was crucial to their progress and, therefore, urged developed nations to support international action to eliminate restrictive trade practices that directly limit the transfer of existing technology to developing countries. The Third World has particularly sought to establish restrictive norms to control the practices of transnational corporations, which are considered harmful to the economies and ideology of developing countries. In this regard, a secretariat was established within the United Nations to begin work on the development of a code of conduct for transnational corporations. Another proposal put forward by the Third Worldist Front concerned an Integrated Commodities Program, which envisages the creation of a common fund to finance stocks and measures related to price stabilization, commodity processing in developing countries, rationalization of the marketing and distribution system, and ensuring access to markets in developed countries.⁸⁹

As highlighted on numerous occasions, through the NIEO proposals the Third World sought to counter the effects of colonialism, which had long subjugated them and persisted even after the decolonization process, Anghie refers to it as the ‘Southern Project.’ One of the main aspects of the NIEO, also attested to in Article 2 of the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States, concerns the control of natural resources. The issue of sovereign control over such resources has been addressed previously at the United Nations, as highlighted in the 1952 Resolution 523 (VI) concerning an Integrated Economic Development and Trade Agreements. On this occasion, the General Assembly affirmed the right of states to exercise control over their natural resources. Legally, the right to sovereignty over natural resources is linked to the principles of self-determination and economic development.⁹⁰

The combination of political and economic aspects present in the NIEO is immediately apparent; as Anghie pointed out, the project combined a political campaign with a moral vision of the global order, aimed at the transformation of the international economic system. In pursuit of this goal, NIEO advocates emphasized the importance of mutual benefit, enlightened self-interest, interdependence and cooperation; however, this was

⁸⁹ C. C. Ferguson, “The Politics of the New International Economic Order”, *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, vol. 32, n. 4, 1977, pp. 147-151.

⁹⁰ A. Anghie, “Legal Aspects”, p. 150.

insufficient. As the text itself suggests, NIEO's goal was to create a global order based on social and economic justice, aimed "to eliminate the widening gap between developed and developing countries."⁹¹ To achieve success in implementing the NIEO or Southern Project, it was essential to promote cooperation among developing countries, as already recognized at the Bandung Conference in 1955. However, due to internal inconsistencies within the Group of 77 and the continued exclusion of the Third World from economic decisions at the global level, a comprehensive reform of both international institutions and international law was necessary.⁹²

In his research paper, Nils Gilman, Executive Vice President of the Berggruen Institute, points out that although the goal of NIEO was clearly defined, as to reduce the economic gap between the global North and South, there was a lack of consensus on the political ends and, even more so, on the methods to be adopted to achieve these goals. Gilman sees the NIEO as a set of interconnected proposals aimed at reforming the global structure, governance and economy. In addition, he suggests conducting a comparative analysis between the NIEO's economic goal and legal strategy. While the economic intent of the NIEO aimed to ensure the self-sufficiency and self-determination of Southern nations, the legal strategy was based on the basic principle of absolute sovereign equality of each nation. In this sense, supporters of NIEO, especially those UNCTAD, seek to exploit the General Assembly as a forum to develop new international legal structures designed to promote the interests of the South. Indeed, with its one state-one vote system, the United Nations proved to be fertile ground for the formulation of legal claims beneficial to these nations.

Gilman focused on a legal paradox: for the jurists of the NIEO it was difficult to uphold the absolute national sovereignty of Southern states while at the same time not allowing Northern states to ignore, in the name of their national sovereignty, the global legal norms proposed by the NIEO. According to Gilman, this legal paradox was accompanied by an additional economic paradox that characterized the NIEO: the claims of economic sovereignty advanced by Third World countries clashed with the principle of transnational economic interdependence. Thus, to achieve success, the NIEO would have to reduce

⁹¹ United Nations General Assembly, "Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order General Assembly resolution 3201 (S-VI)", 1974. [UN.org](http://www.un.org).

⁹² A. Anghie, "Legal Aspects", pp. 145-147.

power inequalities among states; however, to achieve this goal, its legal strategy had to be complemented by a robust political strategy. Indeed, the NIEO proved to be not only a set of legal and economic proposals, but also an explicitly political initiative aimed at expanding the development process of Third World countries. According to Gilman, the economic proposals and related legal measures were functional tools for the political goal of achieving a true global democracy, in which sovereign states would be considered equal, thus completing the decolonization process. The basis of the political element of the NIEO was a common Third Worldist front, unified by a political identity in the struggle against colonialism and imperialism.⁹³

Professor Victor McFarland opens one of his papers by stating that: “The New International Economic Order has proven to be a failure as a political program.”⁹⁴ Demonstrating the close interconnection between the various aspects of the NIEO and the ultimate political goal advocated by Gilman, McFarland, while highlighting the political dimension of the NIEO in the first line, supports his assertion by pointing out an economic failure. In fact, many of the proposals included in the NIEO, which called for a radical transformation of the global economy, were never implemented. Actually, in the decades since, the world economy evolved not according to the NIEO’s vision, characterized by multilateral surveillance and income redistribution, but in the opposite direction, moving toward an approach more sharply based on free markets, neoliberalism and globalization. The political aspect is also central in the words of Ferguson, who stated that: “The question of the nature of the new world order is preeminently a political question.”⁹⁵

From the very first lines of the Declaration on the establishment of the NIEO, the theme of interdependence emerges prominently. This theme was covered extensively by McFarland, who pointed out the different interpretations of this concept. For the proponents of NIEO, the fundamental idea was that developed and developing countries should establish a reciprocal economic relationship so that the United States and other wealthy nations could also benefit from a redistribution of global wealth. This would lead to the creation of a balanced world economy and, consequently, rapid economic growth

⁹³ N. Gilman, “The New International Economic Order”, pp. 5-6.

⁹⁴ McFarland, Victor. “The New International Economic Order, Interdependence, and Globalization.” *Humanity Journal*, vol. 6, n. 1, 2015, p. 217.

⁹⁵ C. C. Ferguson, “The Politics”, p. 143.

on a global scale. The strategy adopted by the developing countries to achieve this redistribution of wealth included an increase in commodity prices. However, according to the United States government's analysis, such an increase would only destabilize the global economy and harm oil-producing countries.⁹⁶

Interdependence was a major issue for developing nations, which were fully aware that they could not independently pursue the implementation of the NIEO. Therefore, support was needed from the industrialized nations, which would have to transfer modern technologies and give preference to imports from developing nations.⁹⁷ This awareness among emerging nations was already present from the early days of the NIEO idea and has been further highlighted by Basosi, who notes that developing countries, as early as the 1960s, had the goal of reforming world governance, but did not intend to leave the Bretton Woods international organizations, which, on the contrary, had seen an increase in the participation of Third World members as a result of the decolonization process. Citing an article by Verena Kross, finally, the realization that the right to development cannot be realized without financial support from developed countries is emphasized.⁹⁸

The reaction of developed countries has not been all the same; some states have shown openness to requests from developing countries within international organizations. Nations such as Sweden, the Netherlands and Canada have shown openness and flexibility in accommodating such requests. In contrast, other countries, such as the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States, have shown either substantial closure or, as will be shown in the case of the United States, strategic openness.⁹⁹ From a legal perspective, for Western states there was the possibility to obstruct the legal initiative of the NIEO. Indeed, the new states were unable to easily change customary international law, which had been established before their existence and used to subordinate them. Ultimately, the developing countries' attempt to reform, reconstitute international law, and eliminate colonial operations through the NIEO project proved ineffective.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ V. McFarland, "The New International Economic Order", p. 217.

⁹⁷ V. McFarland, "The New International Economic Order", p. 219.

⁹⁸ D. Basosi, "L'ONU", p. 66.

⁹⁹ C. C. Ferguson, "The Politics", p.144.

¹⁰⁰ A. Anghie, "Legal Aspects", pp. 152-153.

As argued by Political Scientist Stephen Krasner, the American rejection was based on the perception of that country's leaders, who interpreted the NIEO project as an attack on the structures of international organizations established by the United States at the end of World War II. Contrary to this position, former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt adopted a more conciliatory approach, promoting dialogue between the North and the South. However, even Brandt did not accept the core proposals of the NIEO, such as nationalization of natural resources and a significant change in the international trade system. Gilman notes that the prevailing reaction of the West was neither a rejection nor unconditional assent, but rather a strategy of procrastination and the accentuation of divisions within the G77.¹⁰¹ The expression frequently used to describe this attitude is "talk them to death," which denotes the ability to prolong interminable discussions that would not lead to real change, but only to a continuous postponement of decisions.

Eventually, it became increasingly evident that the North was unwilling to concede major gains; moreover, Boumediene's untimely death in 1978 deprived the NIEO of its most influential leader.¹⁰² Although President Jimmy Carter adopted a relatively more open attitude regarding the expectations of the Global South, especially in the areas of assistance and human rights, his administration failed to bring about fundamental reform of the global economic order. In 1979, the election of Margaret Thatcher as prime minister of Great Britain, and the economic crisis in the United States resulting from the Federal Reserve's rise in interest rates, led to greater cohesion in the Global North, which thus became less inclined to meet the demands of developing countries. The NIEO was finally abandoned during the Cancun Summit in October 1981, when President Ronald Reagan declared that the United States would no longer discuss regarding a new architecture of world governance.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ N. Gilman, "The New International Economic Order", p. 7.

¹⁰² N. Gilman, "The New International Economic Order", p. 8.

¹⁰³ N. Gilman, "The New International Economic Order", p. 8.

Chapter 2

Jimmy Carter's America: Between Continuity and Change

This chapter examines Jimmy Carter's actions in international politics, focusing on the Carter administration's approach to the New International Economic Order, that is, a foreign policy focused on human rights and meeting basic needs in developing countries. After a brief paragraph on understanding the identity of Jimmy Carter, it will go on to examine the actions of his predecessors, Nixon and Ford, and how their administrations addressed the NIEO. The key figures of Henry Kissinger and Daniel Patrick Moynihan in relation to the North-South question will be illustrated, with the aim of highlighting the domestic tension concerning foreign policy, which stood somewhere between pragmatism and ideology, between stability and conflict. The third paragraph will examine the fundamental concept of Jimmy Carter's foreign policy: human rights, understood as a response to global challenges. The new approach that emerged in the 1970s regarding the issue of human rights and basic needs will then be outlined, with the aim of understanding their real meaning and application in foreign policy. Next, some of the criticisms and appreciations expressed by scholars regarding Jimmy Carter's human rights policy will be examined, highlighting both merits and failures. Finally, differences of opinion within the Carter administration itself are examined to understand whether or not these impeded his policies.

1. Jimmy Carter

James Earl Carter Jr. was born on 1st October 1924, in Plains, a town of just over five hundred people located in southwest Georgia. He served as the thirty ninth President of the United States from 1977 to 1981, succeeding Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, and preceding Ronald Reagan. He has been criticized by his successor and some scholars for his inability to deal effectively with the issues that affected the United States during his term. However, his diplomatic approach regarding the NIEO, focused on promoting and

achieving human rights in developing countries, made him famous and secured him the recognition of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.¹⁰⁴

The son of farmer and businessman James Earl Carter Sr. and Lillian Gordy Carter, a nurse, James Earl “Jimmy” Carter pursued academics at Georgia Southwestern College and the Georgia Institute of Technology, later earning a bachelor’s degree from the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis in 1946. That same year, he married Rosalynn Smith, a woman who would have a significant influence in his personal and professional life. Carter launched a career in the United States Navy, serving as a submariner. He pursued a master’s degree at Union College, majoring in reactor technology and nuclear physics, and served as senior officer of the pre-commissioning crew of the second nuclear submarine *Seawolf*. After his father’s death in 1953, Carter returned to Georgia to manage the family’s farming activities. In 1962 he scored an electoral victory as a Democrat for the Georgia Senate, being reelected in 1964. Although he lost the race for governor in 1966, he ran again and became Georgia’s seventy sixth governor in 1971.¹⁰⁵

Shortly before his term as governor ended, Carter announced his candidacy for the Democratic nomination for president in 1974. Against a backdrop of popular skepticism about United States institutions in the wake of the Watergate scandal that had plagued the Nixon administration, Carter presented himself as a man of strong principles capable of restoring the American people’s confidence in their leaders. Running as moderate, Carter promised new ideas without upsetting more conservative voters.¹⁰⁶ After winning the Democratic nomination in July 1976, Carter chose liberal Senator Walter Mondale of Minnesota as his running mate. Carter’s opponent was incumbent Republican President Gerald Ford, who, although not elected, had taken over in 1974 after Richard Nixon’s resignation following Watergate. According to the professor Kaufman, Carter and his

¹⁰⁴ After his term ended, President and Mrs. Carter continued to promote the ideals that guided their private and professional lives. In 1982, President Carter became a professor at Emory University in Atlanta and, in collaboration with the latter, founded the Carter Center with the goal of “promoting peace, fighting disease and building hope” in various nations around the world. In 2002, on the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Center, Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize “for his decades of tireless efforts to seek peaceful solutions to international conflicts, to promote democracy and human rights, and to foster economic and social development.” See also: [JCPL.pdf](#).

¹⁰⁵ P. G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Postpresidency*, New York, A Lisa Drew Book, Scriben, 1997, pp. 72-82.

¹⁰⁶ B. I. Kaufman, *The Carter Years: Presidential Profiles*, New York, Infobase Publishing, 2006, p. 4.

advisers were convinced that they could take advantage of the dwarfing discontent against Washington following the Watergate affair and the Vietnam War to win the election. In November 1976, Carter triumphed in the election, garnering fifty-one percent of the popular vote and garnering two hundred and ninety-seven electoral votes to Ford's two hundred and forty.¹⁰⁷ However, as Kaufman points out, when the new president entered the White House, he faced problems that were arguably more complex than those faced by other presidents. And his policies were vague, not only on specific issues, but on his overall sense of national purpose and national direction, the very issues he emphasized during the campaign.¹⁰⁸

From the very first chapters of the biography of Jimmy Carter written by Author Jonathan Alter, the thirty-ninth president of the United States comes across as an “outsider.” Alter highlights not only his outsider status in private life, dating back to childhood, but also in the public context, particularly during his run for governor of Georgia. There, Carter expressed tolerant views regarding ethnic minorities and the presence of women in government, a choice that detached him from supremacist groups.¹⁰⁹ This was particularly significant since Georgia and the rest of the Southern states were controlled by supremacist ideology and racial conservatism tradition that severely punished politicians in favor of inclusion or equal rights for women and African Americans.¹¹⁰ Nationally, he was perceived and defined himself as an outsider because, at the time of his presidential candidacy, he had never had any ties to Washington D.C..¹¹¹ Carter's policy orientation was also outside the traditional categories. Alter points out that although Carter was a member of the Democratic Party, he carried out several initiatives commonly associated with Ronald Reagan, such as appointing Paul Volcker as Chairman of the Federal Reserve, reducing the deficit and the growth rate of the federal workforce, stopping the policy of détente toward Moscow by inviting Soviet dissidents to the White House, as well as increasing the defense budget. However, Carter was also the first President to

¹⁰⁷ For more information regarding President Carter's biography see also: CarterCenter.org, Britannica.com and NobelPrize.org (last consultation on 11 June 2025).

¹⁰⁸ B. I. Kaufman, *The Carter Years*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, New York, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020, p. 7.

¹¹⁰ E. Hatfield, “Segregation”, *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified 20 July 20. GeorgiaEncyclopedia.org (last consultation on 11 June 2025).

¹¹¹ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 7.

implement a policy explicitly devoted to promoting individual human rights in other countries.¹¹²

According to Politician Betty Glad, Carter symbolizes the American myth of the outsider who reaches the White House and leads the nation toward high moral values, opposing a corrupt system.¹¹³ However, she argues that: “If the outsider has neither practical experience nor education in the field of foreign policy this dependence on others will pose special problems for him.”¹¹⁴ Among the problems mentioned by the author is his inability to control his advisers. Arguing that Brzezinski took advantage of Carter’s inexperience to steer policy toward decisions partly contrary to the President’s ideals, and acknowledging a certain naïveté in Carter, Glad writes: “Brzezinski also encouraged a muscular stance that led the president into policies counter to his early desires for arms limitation and the promotion of human rights around the world.”¹¹⁵

The main criticism against Carter concerns his propensity to follow an idealistic, naïve and counterproductive policy that was overly focused on human rights to the point of neglecting other issues deemed priorities. June 1979 marked a pivotal point in Carter’s presidency, during which the energy crisis, public discontent and the country’s economic difficulties reached their peak. In this complicated context, on 20 June 1979, Carter announced one billion of dollars in federal funding for solar energy research, a one-hundred million dollars “solar bank” providing credits to homeowners who install basic solar systems, and a goal of twenty percent of the nation’s energy coming from renewable sources by the year 2000.¹¹⁶ The choice proved unwelcome, public opinion polls in June 1979 showed an approval rating not only the lowest of his presidency, but also comparable to that found by Richard Nixon at the time of his resignation in the wake of the Watergate scandal.¹¹⁷ Similarly to Alter’s argument, Professor Jarel Rosati also pointed out the failure of domestic policies, such as the reduction of unemployment and

¹¹² J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 6.

¹¹³ B. Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2009, p. 279.

¹¹⁴ B. Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, p. 279.

¹¹⁵ B. Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, p. 280.

¹¹⁶ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 5.

inflation.¹¹⁸ It was towards the conclusion of his term in 1978 that Congress passed the Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act, commonly known as the Humphrey-Hawkins Act, which provides for appropriate government planning and intervention in order to achieve a reduction in unemployment and, in the long-term perspective, zero inflation.

At the conclusion of his presidency in 1980, Carter was perceived as an unsuccessful president, an ineffective leader, as evidenced by high unemployment and inflation, and failure in the foreign policy such as the Iran hostage crisis, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. However, toward the conclusion of the 1980s, the public began to view Carter more positively because of his success.¹¹⁹

2. Nixon and Ford

In the years leading up to Carter's election, the United States government faced several significant challenges. After a period during which capitalist nations had recognized the leadership of the United States, beginning in the 1970s, this cohesion of the developed world began to disintegrate. Historian Daniel Sargent identifies the causes of this fracture in the choices made by the government in relation to the Vietnam conflict and in the difficulties that Nixon encountered in the wake of the Watergate scandal, which undermined the reputation of United States leadership both internationally and domestically. In addition, Sargent highlights how Nixon's attempt to establish a policy of détente between the United States and the Soviet Union beginning in 1969 raised concerns among European governments, who feared being excluded from a new bipolar world order.¹²⁰ In this context, the oil crisis further aggravated tensions: European countries, which were dependent on oil supplies, began to break away from Israel, thus distancing themselves from Washington. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, in office from 1973 to 1977, criticized this attitude, saying: "The Europeans behaved like jackals. Their behavior

¹¹⁸ J. A. Rosati, "Jimmy Carter, a Man before His Time? The Emergence and Collapse of the First Post-Cold War Presidency", *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, n. 3, 1993, p. 459.

¹¹⁹ J. A. Rosati, "Jimmy Carter, a Man before His Time?", p. 459.

¹²⁰ D. J. Sargent, "North/South: The United States Responds to the New International Economic Order", *Humanity Journal*, vol. 6, n. 1, 2015, p. 203.

was a total disgrace. They did everything to egg on the Arabs. They gave us no support when we needed it.”¹²¹ In light of these considerations, Sargent argues that the beliefs that emerged at the end of World War II, that economic growth was unlimited and that the state could drive that growth, were now falling apart.¹²² Indeed, he points out that in order to understand Washington’s response to the challenge of the NIEO, it is crucial to place that challenge in the context of a general crisis in postwar institutional arrangements.¹²³

Among the many challenges facing United States governments during the 1970s, this thesis focuses particularly on the NIEO project. In December 1975, during the presidency of Gerald Ford, the *Time Magazine* newspaper reported: “A conflict between two worlds, one rich, one poor, is developing, and the battlefield is the globe itself.”¹²⁴ Historian Mark Mazower points out that the conflict mentioned by the newspaper emerged from the fact that decolonization, contrary to what was hoped for, did not allow developing countries to achieve true independence; on the contrary, it allowed the developed world to increase its influence in the international context.¹²⁵ Mazower also claims that the internal cohesion of the Group of 77 has proven fragile, especially with regard to the issue of commodity prices, while UNCTAD has proven to be a weak organization, unable to enforce effective regulations.¹²⁶ In addition, it is noted by Franczak that it was on this limited cohesion among developing countries that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger implemented a foreign policy strategy aimed at further fragmenting the Third Worldist front, thereby hindering the NIEO project and aiming to increase United States geopolitical influence.¹²⁷

¹²¹ U.S. Department of State, “Arab-Israeli Crisis and War”, 2011, declassified, U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, Foreign Relation of United States (FRUS), vol. XXV, p. 692. [History.State.gov](https://history.state.gov)

¹²² D. J. Sargent, “North/South: The United States Responds”, p. 204.

¹²³ D. J. Sargent, “North/South: The United States Responds”, p. 201.

¹²⁴ [Time.com](https://www.time.com) (last consultation on 13 March 2025).

¹²⁵ M. Mazower, *Governing the World. The History of an Idea*, New York, The Penguin Press, 2012, p. 299.

¹²⁶ M. Mazower, *Governing the World*, p. 302.

¹²⁷ M. Franczak, “Losing the Battle, Winning the War: Neoconservatives versus the New International Economic Order, 1974–82”, *Diplomatic History*, vol. 43, n. 5, 2019, p. 868.

In addition to the Decades of Development of the 1960s and 1970s, United Nations planned also major development reports, as mentioned in the previous chapter.¹²⁸ However, as Mazower argued, such programs would require much more substantial investment than the White House was willing to consider.¹²⁹ Mazower highlights that although there are multiple reasons why the Third World has not achieved the goals of the NIEO, the main cause lies in United States opposition.¹³⁰ Sargent also asserts that the United States, as the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the industrialized world, played a crucial role in the responses to the NIEO and, consequently, in its failure.¹³¹

From May 1974 to 1977, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger adopted a constructive peacemaking technique, referred to by Sargent himself as the “Southern strategy.” This strategy, at least apparently, aligned with recommendations made by global think tanks such as the Club of Rome and the Trilateral Commission.¹³² The Club of Rome was founded in 1965 with the aim of promoting a systemic and long-term vision of the human problems that hinder the development of the planet: population growth, agriculture, depletion of non-renewable resources, industrial activity and pollution. In 1972, the club released the report “The Limits of Development,” an invitation to examine objectively and scientifically the effect that human actions and use of resources have on Earth. In particular, the report significantly questioned the established concept of incessant material growth and the pursuit of unlimited economic expansion.¹³³ The Trilateral Commission is a global organization founded in 1973 by David Rockefeller that brings

¹²⁸ An early approach to open development by the United States government is represented by the thirty-third President, Harry Truman. President Carter in fact had a deep admiration for President Truman, to the point of placing on the oval office table Truman’s sign “The Buck Stops Here.” J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 8. The sign, “The Buck Stops Here” on Truman’s desk reflected his belief that he was ultimately responsible for the actions of his administration. In a speech known as the “Point Four program” in 1949, Truman underlined the importance of foreign aid as a tool for spreading democracy and peace, identifying global poverty as a threat to the American way of life. He declared that the United States would work through the specialized agencies of the United Nations, wherever possible to achieve this goal. M. Mazower, *Governing the World*, pp. 274-275.

¹²⁹ M. Mazower, *Governing the World*, p. 287.

¹³⁰ M. Mazower, *Governing the World*, p. 315.

¹³¹ D. J. Sargent, “North/South: The United States Responds”, p. 202.

¹³² D. J. Sargent, “North/South: The United States Responds”, p. 202.

¹³³ ClubOfRome.org (last consultation on 11 June 2025).

together senior policymakers, business leaders and representatives from academia and the media to discuss and propose solutions to some of the world's most complex problems.¹³⁴

According to Sargent, Kissinger began the implementation of his strategy only five days after Boumediene addressed the United Nations General Assembly in April 1974. The Secretary of State asserted that the oil crisis had shattered the notion of “Northern rich” and the “Southern poor.”¹³⁵ Five days after Boumediene addressed the General Assembly in April 1974, Kissinger stressed that OPEC's actions had further intensified the poverty of the world's most disadvantaged populations and could not serve as an example for other developing countries.¹³⁶ According to Sargent, Kissinger believed that solutions to poverty should be sought in growth and development, rather than redistribution. Such growth, according to Kissinger, would only be achievable within an open and expanding world economy. Therefore, Kissinger manifested his intention to enter into negotiations with Third World countries, but the real goal was to preserve the United States-led global economic system and to neutralize the NIEO,¹³⁷ especially in order to prevent this project from creating further divisions within the West, threatening the existing world order.¹³⁸

A significant part of the efforts undertaken by Henry Kissinger toward the Third World was specifically focused on the food sector. He promised to increase United States food production, already recognized as a world leader in corn, wheat and soybean exports, and to provide more assistance to developing countries. He also promised to share advanced agricultural technologies. These initiatives were presented publicly by Kissinger as an ethical imperative; however, according to Sargent, in the private sphere, his genuine motives were clearly revealed. Although he opposed the demands of the NIEO, he was willing to negotiate on certain issues to avoid direct conflict with Third World leaders. While on the one hand he guaranteed support for developing countries, on the other hand he attempted to obstruct NIEO demands in order to preserve United States dominance in the global economy.¹³⁹ In fact, Sargent points out that Kissinger's openness, dialogue,

¹³⁴ Trilateral.org (last consultation on 11 June 2025).

¹³⁵ D. J. Sargent, “North/South: The United States Responds”, p. 206.

¹³⁶ D. J. Sargent, “North/South: The United States Responds”, p. 207.

¹³⁷ D. J. Sargent, “North/South: The United States Responds”, p. 205.

¹³⁸ D. J. Sargent, “North/South: The United States Responds”, p. 211.

¹³⁹ D. J. Sargent, “North/South: The United States Responds”, pp. 207-208.

and promises did not materialize into effective support and did not lead to the fulfillment of the demands made by the NIEO.¹⁴⁰

Professor Rosati argues that, in the context of political realism, the main threat to international peace and stability comes from the rise of dissatisfied and ‘revolutionary’ states that challenge the status quo and attempt to alter the existing system.¹⁴¹ It should be emphasized, therefore, that the strategy adopted by Kissinger in the North-South context, as well as the policy of détente in relations with the Soviet Union, was strongly influenced by this perspective.¹⁴² Kissinger’s foreign policy is frequently associated with the concept of realpolitik. According to Professor Alexander Groth, the Secretary of State’s realpolitik is based on a pragmatic and utilitarian approach to international politics, in which national interest and political stability are considered far more relevant than moral and ethical principles.¹⁴³ Historian Phil Williams interprets his policy as a co-optation strategy articulated around three key elements: the integration of the Soviet Union into the international order based on norms established by the United States; the involvement of China in diplomatic relations; and the establishment of new United States allies to support the containment strategy in emerging regions.¹⁴⁴

Henry Kissinger’s approach to foreign policy was characterized by a tendency toward conciliation. However, other members of the administration, notably Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Ambassador to the United Nations from 1975 to 1976, expressed significant distrust of Kissinger’s strategy.¹⁴⁵ Moynihan argued that developing countries were being influenced by ‘socialist’ and ‘redistributive’ ideologies, and asserted that the United

¹⁴⁰ D. J. Sargent, “North/South: The United States Responds”, p. 211.

¹⁴¹ J. A. Rosati, “Jimmy Carter, a Man before His Time?”, p. 465.

¹⁴² Hans Morgenthau with his book “Politics Among Nations” in 1948 laid the foundation for classical relativism, which was later adopted and transformed into neorealism by Kenneth Waltz in “Theory of International Politics” in 1979 to explain the logic behind the Cold War. Contemporary authors such as Stephen Walt and Jhon Mearsheimer apply the assumptions of realism to U.S. foreign policy. Historians of international relations mentioned in this paper such as Rosati, Williams and Sargent, while not realists, recognize in Kissinger's strategic actions a realist foundation based on preservation of power, management of balance, and containment of revisionism.

¹⁴³ A. J. Groth, “Henry Kissinger and the Limits of Realpolitik”, *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, vol. 5, n. 1, 2011, p. 211-213.

¹⁴⁴ P. Williams, “The Limits of American Power: From Nixon to Reagan”, *International Affairs*, vol. 63, n. 4, 1987, p. 576.

¹⁴⁵ D. J. Sargent, “North/South: The United States Responds”, p. 208.

States should firmly oppose such tendencies. In comparing the two figures, Sargent points out that Moynihan's ideological orientation was in sharp contrast to the Secretary of State's pragmatism. However, Kissinger, as a strategist, had supported Moynihan's appointment as United States representative to the United Nations, convinced that his liberal approach could serve political ends.¹⁴⁶ The decision to comparing Kissinger and Moynihan is based on the fact that although they were not the only political figures to confront the NIEO, their contrasting and complementary perspectives proved to be the most relevant and influential in the United States response to the NIEO. In addition, the two figures clearly highlight the tension present in United States foreign policy during the 1970s.

In February 1974, following President Nixon's involvement in the Watergate scandal while Kissinger was on a visit to the Middle East, the debate over American foreign policy became increasingly heated. Moynihan, an admirer of President Woodrow Wilson and his commitment to promoting universal moral values, denounced the growing distance of American foreign policy from the original ideals and mission of promoting democracy.¹⁴⁷ Mazower observes that Moynihan's call for a reintegration of morality in foreign policy was a direct attack on the diplomacy of Nixon and Kissinger, which aimed to solve problems pragmatically through diplomatic negotiations between statesmen, without addressing the domestic issues of foreign countries, including human rights issues.¹⁴⁸

A further distinction between the two figures, as pointed out by Mazower, concerns the operational context. While Kissinger ascribed relevance to the North-South divide in relation to the potential threat to the United States, Moynihan argued that the real challenge to America came not from the Soviet Union but from managing the rise of the Third World. In 1975, Moynihan published an article titled "The United States in Opposition," in which he criticized the work of the United Nations, which, far from being the institution charged with the realization of Wilson's ideals, was dominated by Third World demands.¹⁴⁹ President Ford, the previous year, had also denounced the "Tyranny

¹⁴⁶ D. J. Sargent, "North/South: The United States Responds", p. 210.

¹⁴⁷ M. Franczak, "Losing the Battle, Winning the War: Neoconservatives versus the New International Economic Order, 1974-82", *Diplomatic History*, vol. 43, n. 5, 2019, p. 885.

¹⁴⁸ M. Mazower, *Governing the World*, pp. 305-307.

¹⁴⁹ M. Mazower, *Governing the World*, pp. 308-310.

of the majority” in the United Nations General Assembly.¹⁵⁰ Historian Michael Franczak argues that despite their differing views and approaches, Moynihan and Kissinger shared an understanding that Third World claims and actions within the United Nations had a significant impact on international politics. However, the common American ideal did not inhibit their disputes, both private and public, culminating in Moynihan’s resignation in February 1976. His resignation, however, gave him considerable notoriety and approval.¹⁵¹

At a meeting held at the White House on 26 May 1975, in the presence of President Ford and the Heads of the State and Treasury Department, significant disagreements emerged between those who preferred to adopt a counterstrategy and those who opted for a more discreet co-optation approach. On that occasion, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger reiterated his position to William Simon, then United States Secretary of the Treasury, stating: “We can control the situation better by appearing conciliatory and cooperative.”¹⁵² Moreover, two days before this meeting, Kissinger had already communicated his strategy to President Ford in the following words: “I don’t want to accept a New Economic Order, but I don’t want to confront Boumediene. I want to fuzz the ground.”¹⁵³

A different approach to global challenges began with Jimmy Carter’s administration in 1977. According to Mazower, the first difficulties Carter faced included Third World demands, human rights, and a third challenge concerning the environment.¹⁵⁴ In a more detailed analysis, Rosati lists additional issues that the Carter administration sought to address, including normalizing relations with former adversaries such as the People’s Republic of China, promoting arms control, resolving conflicts in the Third World, and maintaining a healthy global economy. Rosati argues that Carter’s varied agenda is the

¹⁵⁰ President Gerald R. Ford’s Address to the 29th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, 18 September 1974. FordLibraryMuseum.gov (last consultation on 13 March 2025).

¹⁵¹ M. Franczak, “Losing the Battle, Winning the War”, p. 871.

¹⁵² O. Fioretos, “Rhetorical Appeals and Strategic Cooptation in the Rise and Fall of The New International Economic Order”, *Global Policy*, vol. 11, n. 3, 2020, p. 76. Memorandum of Conversation, 1975a, p. 1011.

¹⁵³ O. Fioretos, “Rhetorical Appeals and Strategic Cooptation”, p. 77. Memorandum of Conversation, 1975b, p. 1003.

¹⁵⁴ M. Mazower, *Governing the World*, p. 311.

result of a complex vision of interdependence.¹⁵⁵ He also points out how Carter administration officials perceived much greater global complexity than their predecessors. Moving away from political realism and *realpolitik*, Carter adopted a more open approach to interdependence, expanding international relations.¹⁵⁶

Williams highlights an element of continuity with previous administrations, arguing that the Carter administration's concern for North-South issues and human rights protection did not represent idealism, but rather a subtle attempt to maintain the United States leadership role. The difference from the actions of Nixon and Ford lay in the fact that the Carter, like Moynihan, focused more on North-South relations rather than on containing the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁷ Rosati, in this regard, points out that, despite the broad recognition of Carter's openness on foreign policy, there are disagreements about the extent to which Carter's foreign policy represents a real change from the Cold War era and previous administrations. Some critics argue that the Carter administration's foreign policy can be seen as 'containment by other means,' thus operating in the tradition of *détente* initiated under the leadership of Henry Kissinger during the Nixon and Ford presidencies. Others, however, claim that the Carter administration 'rejected containment' as the basis of its foreign policy.¹⁵⁸

In this regard, Williams argues that, since 1947, different administrations have used different means to contain the Soviet Union, while all pursuing the same goal. The Carter administration, in contrast, sought to move beyond the policy of containment, reducing the focus on fighting the USSR in favor of human rights issues.¹⁵⁹ Rosati, too, recognizes this significant change of course, which was considered evident as early as President Jimmy Carter's famous speech at Notre Dame University, in which Carter declared that United States policy during the Cold War was guided by two principles: a belief that Soviet expansion was almost inevitable but had to be contained, and a corresponding belief in the importance of an almost exclusive alliance between noncommunist nations

¹⁵⁵ J. A. Rosati, "Jimmy Carter, a Man before His Time?", p. 467.

¹⁵⁶ J. A. Rosati, "Jimmy Carter, a Man before His Time?", p. 465.

¹⁵⁷ P. Williams, "The Limits of American Power", p. 577.

¹⁵⁸ J. A. Rosati, "Jimmy Carter, a Man before His Time?", p. 460.

¹⁵⁹ P. Williams, "The Limits of American Power", p. 577.

on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁶⁰ Sargent, while noting that the 1976 presidential election resulted in the formation of a more open administration than Ford's, points out that the commitment to the creation of a new economic order was not only a defensive imperative, but also represented a constructive opportunity.¹⁶¹ Carter committed to fulfilling some of the NIEO's demands, including primary materials agreements, resource transfers, tariff liberalization and greater representation in international organizations. However, his achievements did not exceed those of his predecessors.¹⁶²

In conclusion, Jimmy Carter's foreign policy, although aimed at promoting a new international order based on human rights and global interdependence, faced significant challenges both domestically and internationally. From the writings of authors such as Daniel Sargent, Mark Mazower, Michael Franczak and Jarel Rosati, it emerges that, despite good intentions, the Carter administration did not achieve significant progress regarding Third World demands in the context of the NIEO. Mazower highlights how, during Carter's term, the United States returned to the aspiration of combating poverty globally, a goal typical of the Truman era that had been neglected in the early 1970s.¹⁶³ However, he points out that the attempt to promote economic solidarity with the South was not supported by real cohesion among developing nations. Sargent emphasizes that although Carter sought to address global issues with a more open and idealistic approach, his administration failed to overcome practical difficulties and internal disagreements. Sargent's research was found to be of critical importance in that the American idealism-realism conflicts are highlighted, and NIEO is regarded as an event of United States significance. Franczak emphasizes an element of continuity between Carter and Moynihan, pointing out that while the latter criticized the Ford administration for making excessive efforts in trying to appease Third World demands, Carter argued that insufficient progress had been made.¹⁶⁴ Despite these difficulties, Carter gained respect for his post-presidential actions, demonstrating an enduring commitment to global peace and development. His administration thus represents an attempt at an evolution of

¹⁶⁰ J. A. Rosati, "Jimmy Carter, a Man before His Time?", p. 463. [TheAmericanPresidencyProject.ucsb.edu](https://www.theamericanpresidencyproject.ucsb.edu) (last consultation on 15 March 2025).

¹⁶¹ D. J. Sargent, "North/South: The United States Responds", p. 211.

¹⁶² D. J. Sargent, "North/South: The United States Responds", p. 212.

¹⁶³ M. Mazower, *Governing the World*, p. 303.

¹⁶⁴ M. Franczak, "Losing the Battle, Winning the War", p. 886.

American foreign policy, albeit one marked by political challenges and resistance. Together, the authors remind us that the NIEO accomplishments of the Carter administration were not just the product of virtuous motivation unsupported by reality, but also of developing countries' weak point of solidarity and shifting internal American discourse.

3. Jimmy Carter's Foreign Policy and Human Rights

In relation to human rights, it is worth noting the significant rise in importance of this concept that occurred during the 1970s, a period when human rights emerged as a major global ideology. Professor Samuel Moyn examines the transition from a utopian political vision, typical of the 1960s, to a more pragmatic and moralistic conception. The economic recession and oil shock of 1973 generated a climate of discontent and disillusionment in the West. Human rights emerged, therefore, as an alternative to the traditional ideologies of that era.¹⁶⁵ Moyn questions the reasons why human rights, despite having an established theoretical basis since the 1940s, had not yet been recognized as a globally shared universal language. The explanation for this phenomenon lies in the fact that the universally accepted vision of human rights only became concrete when it was adopted by social movements and activist groups. As early as the 1960s, social movements had made human rights their own, adopting them as slogans of their struggles;¹⁶⁶ however, Moyn highlights how each social movement focused primarily on promoting the specific rights of its own interest.¹⁶⁷ In contrast, during the 1970s, several nongovernmental organizations began to adopt a broader perspective regarding human rights. Among them, Amnesty International stood out for its ability to marginalize the role of the United Nations as a central forum, thereby generating grassroots advocacy for human rights and raising public awareness of these issues.¹⁶⁸ Unlike the initial human rights groups active in earlier decades, Amnesty International did not view the United Nations as the main

¹⁶⁵ S. Moyn, *The Last Utopia. Human Rights in History*, Cambridge and London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010, p. 121.

¹⁶⁶ S. Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, p. 122.

¹⁶⁷ S. Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, p. 124.

¹⁶⁸ S. Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, p. 130.

advocacy point; avoiding pursuing reforms in international governance, it instead took a direct and public approach to the suffering of vulnerable people.¹⁶⁹

Prior to Carter's term, United States foreign policy, as highlighted in the previous section, was predominantly driven by logics of power, security, and geopolitical interests, rather than by moral principles. However, during his presidency, Carter transformed human rights into a cornerstone of his policy. Indeed, he used the language of human rights to redefine the United States position on the international stage in response to the conclusion of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, events that had deeply undermined confidence in the administration.¹⁷⁰ Since his inaugural address, Carter stated that the United States commitment to human rights must be unconditional.¹⁷¹

Moyn recognizes that the Carter administration's policies and the universal language associated with human rights were one of the key pillars for their global outreach, in addition to the Helsinki process and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.¹⁷² The year 1977 is considered to be of crucial importance for human rights, both because of President Carter's declaration in his inaugural address and because of the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Amnesty International, which highlighted how fundamental rights represented a universal value to be promoted through concrete actions worldwide. Thus, Carter's policy was not limited to mere idealistic rhetoric, but also included practical measures, such as the inclusion of human rights issues as a prerequisite for the provision of aid to foreign countries.¹⁷³

It can be concluded that one of the main distinguishing features of the 1970s about human rights was a strong appeal to morality. Human rights were perceived not only as strategically necessary but also as inherently pure morally, making them particularly attractive in an era characterized by widespread distrust of traditional political

¹⁶⁹ S. Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, p. 131.

¹⁷⁰ S. Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, p. 151.

¹⁷¹ Jimmy Carter, "Inaugural Address", 20 January 1977, *Public Papers of the Presidents: Carter, 1977*, pp. 1-4. [The American Presidency Project. ucsb.edu](https://www.americanpresidencyproject.org/papers-and-records) (last consultation on 12 April 2025).

¹⁷² S. Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, p. 149. To reduce tensions between the Soviet and Western blocs, the Helsinki process and the CSCE initiated an important series of discussions concerning human rights and fundamental freedoms, and fostered economic, scientific and humanitarian cooperation between the two sides.

¹⁷³ S. Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, p. 154.

institutions.¹⁷⁴ However, Moyn argues that it is not possible to say with certainty whether human rights have had a significant practical impact.¹⁷⁵ It is, however, legitimate to say that they created a motivating ideology for the social movements of the time, which were driven by a desire for renewal and a willingness to abandon old utopias, thus contributing to the hope of building a better future.¹⁷⁶

According to Franczak, the core of Carter's foreign policy consisted of a new approach to international aid, focused on meeting "basic human needs" in health, education and nutrition.¹⁷⁷ As also highlighted by Moyn, Franczak argues that Carter attempted to capitalize on a wave of support for development reform that was emerging in the 1970s within the United States Congress, where the shift to basic needs was already underway. Carter and his Secretary of State Cyrus Vance asserted that basic needs and human rights should coexist and that any new human rights policy would be not only incomplete but also unacceptable to the Third World without their inclusion. However, while the American press celebrated basic needs as Carter's most innovative idea, Third World leaders perceived such emphasis as a threat to their more radical proposals for achieving a new international economic order.¹⁷⁸ Franczak argued that Carter pursued a policy of North-South dialogue that categorically rejected NIEO's economic and political agenda and attempted to replace it with its human rights and development priorities.¹⁷⁹ Pérez-Guerrero, former UNCTAD Secretary General and Conference on International Economic Cooperation co-chair, expressed concern that the North-South dialogue had reached a stalemate. This was in addition to the suspicion that Carter's new focus on basic needs in foreign aid was aimed at diverting attention from the NIEO's emphasis on structural change.¹⁸⁰ However, as Franczak recognizes, the fact that Carter viewed the Third World as more than merely a battleground for Cold War contentions represents a qualitative shift from his predecessors.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁴ S. Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, p. 171.

¹⁷⁵ S. Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, p. 173.

¹⁷⁶ S. Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, p. 175.

¹⁷⁷ M. Franczak, "Human Rights and Basic Needs: Jimmy Carter's North-South Dialogue, 1977-81", *Cold War History*, vol. 18, n. 4, 2018, p. 463.

¹⁷⁸ M. Franczak, "Human Rights and Basic Needs", p. 463.

¹⁷⁹ M. Franczak, "Human Rights and Basic Needs", p. 449.

¹⁸⁰ M. Franczak, "Human Rights and Basic Needs", p. 453.

¹⁸¹ M. Franczak, "Human Rights and Basic Needs", p. 463.

Moyn, eight years after the publication of his book “The Last Utopia,” also devoted an in-depth reflection on the link between human rights and basic needs in his work titled “Not Enough.” He argues that the parallel development of human rights and basic needs has privileged the idea of the need to ensure a minimum level of satisfaction, rather than pursuing true material equality. In this way, such abstract concepts represent an attempt to address in an ethical and less radical manner the demands for global equality raised by postcolonial countries, stating:

“The rise of the basic needs paradigm in development thinking, along with its intersection with the concurrent human rights revolution, starkly reveals how visions of sufficient distribution supplanted any notion of material equality from an early date - not least because American political leaders and non-governmental advocates were most enamored of the consolidation of the rights and needs concepts.¹⁸² [...] rights and needs were really attempts to ethically outflank the more ambitious global equality that postcolonial states themselves proposed in the ‘New International Economic Order’ demands of 1974–75.”¹⁸³

Under the Carter administration, the United States significantly adopted such concepts. Moyn points out that, in the pursuit of global goals, an attempt to avoid support for an egalitarian vision of the South was manifested, proposing solutions oriented toward the complete fulfillment of basic needs, such as education and nutrition.¹⁸⁴

The Foreign Assistance Act of 1973 had already traced the essential needs considered basic by the United States Congress, which was majority democratic.¹⁸⁵ Subsequent to Kissinger’s strategy, the policy actually materialized through international speeches, such as those delivered by Cyrus Vance in 1977, in which human rights were presented as an answer to global urgencies, such as hunger, disease and illiteracy, but without addressing the idea of egalitarian redistribution of resources.¹⁸⁶ Moyn, therefore, argues that the human rights revolution resulted in a shift away from the principles of global social

¹⁸² S. Moyn, *Not Enough. Human Rights in an Unequal World*, Cambridge and London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018, p. 120.

¹⁸³ S. Moyn, *Not Enough*, p. 121.

¹⁸⁴ S. Moyn, *Not Enough*, p. 141.

¹⁸⁵ S. Moyn, *Not Enough*, p. 142.

¹⁸⁶ S. Moyn, *Not Enough*, p. 143.

equality, paving the way for the establishment of economic models that neglected issues of redistribution and equality.¹⁸⁷

From the day of his inauguration, the president was careful to make it clear that the promotion of human rights would not be relegated exclusively to the sphere of domestic policy but would assume a role of relevance in foreign policy as well. He, therefore, emphasized that the government would show special support for those countries capable of respecting human rights. In this regard, he stated: “Because we are free, we can never be indifferent to the fate of freedom elsewhere. Our moral sense dictates a clear-cut preference for those societies which share with us an abiding respect for individual human rights”.¹⁸⁸ And he stated also: “We are a proudly idealistic nation but let no one confuse our idealism with weakness”.¹⁸⁹ This passage points out that commitment to human rights for Carter was not an optional choice, but rather a responsibility. However, the criticism that his policy was “weak” represented one of the most relevant observations. A further significant aspect of President Carter’s commitment to human rights is his emphasis on global cooperation aimed at spreading human rights around the world. In this context, he stated: “The United States alone cannot guarantee the basic right of every human being to be free of poverty and hunger and disease and political repression. We can and will cooperate with others in combating these enemies of mankind.”¹⁹⁰ This passage thus leads us to reflect on what Carter sees as the human rights that must be guaranteed. As defined by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights:

Human rights are rights we have simply because we exist as human beings — they are not granted by any state. These universal rights are inherent to us all, regardless of nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status. They range from the most fundamental — the right to life — to those that make life worth living, such as the rights to food, education, work, health, and liberty.

Although all people have human rights regardless of the legal system in which they live, many documents have established human rights so that everyone can develop rules and

¹⁸⁷ S. Moyn, *Not Enough*, p. 145.

¹⁸⁸ U.S. Department of State, “*Foundation of Foreign Policy*”, 2014, declassified, U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, FRUS, vol. I, p. 66. History.State.gov

¹⁸⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Foundation of Foreign Policy*, p. 65.

¹⁹⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Foundation of Foreign Policy*, p. 67.

processes for the realization of them. The key document in this regard is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has provided the basis for various human rights treaties.¹⁹¹

In a study prepared by the Ad Hoc Interagency Group on Human Rights and Foreign Assistance in August 1977, at the request of the National Security Council, it was found that the United States goal of promoting the observance of human rights in other countries is based on the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In particular, three groups of rights are distinguished: the rights of integrity of the person, comprising the prohibition of torture and the right to due process; economic and social rights, i.e., the right to be free from governmental actions or inactions that hinder individuals from meeting basic needs such as health care, education and housing; and finally, the right to enjoy civil and political liberties.¹⁹² Carter Administration's policy explicitly includes the first two groups of rights. The inclusion of economic and social rights, the agency reported, could result in significant benefits for the Third World, since many nations have not yet reached a degree of development that guarantees the basic needs of their citizens. A policy that neglected such rights would therefore be inconsistent with United States humanitarian ideals and could undermine international relations. However, the agency pointed out that although the three groups are of equal importance, they might be pursued differently in practice. Indeed, the main priority is given to the first group of rights, followed by the promotion of civil and political rights and, finally, support for economic rights.¹⁹³ In reality, the hierarchy became clear; the administration's decisions demonstrated a moral choice among rights, considering some human rights more legitimate and significant than others. As will be pointed out in the next chapter, although the equal value of the three categories of rights is declared, Carter did not advocate the redistribution of global wealth, but focused on defending civil and political rights, safeguarding citizens from oppressive regimes, and meeting basic human needs in developing countries.

¹⁹¹ [CarterCenter.org](https://www.cartercenter.org) (last consultation on 20 March 2025).

¹⁹² J. Carter, "Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC-28: Human Rights", 15 August 1977, declassified, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum (JCLPM), National Security Council (NSC) Staff, Memoranda for the President: Presidential Review Memoranda, box. 1.

¹⁹³ U.S. Department of State, "Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs", 2014, declassified, U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, FRUS, vol. II, p. 244. [History.State.gov](https://history.state.gov)

In a document drafted by the State Department in June 1977 on PRM-28, the administration's goals concerning human rights are clearly outlined. It stresses the need to ensure consistency between human rights policy and existing international constraints; the promotion of civil and political liberties in both democratic and non-democratic countries; the improvement of basic needs, such as food, housing, health care and education; and engagement with states that violate these rights, through the adoption of sanctions or suspension of assistance. In fact, the following is reported: "Reduction in the level of U.S. association with regimes which engage in gross violations of human rights of their citizens."¹⁹⁴ The importance of public and private diplomacy in achieving the goals is emphasized, as: "Failure to see human rights improvements ultimately will jeopardize those bilateral relations."¹⁹⁵

A Telegram from the Department of State to All American Republic Diplomatic Posts states that: "The Department is undertaking a broad scale effort to implement the administration's human rights policy as effectively as possible."¹⁹⁶ In fact, Human Rights Evaluation Reports were introduced, which the State Department said were intended to gather information on the state of human rights in each country, not with the aim of creating a "blacklist," but in order to focus efforts where improvements were needed. However, the State Department has frequently been accused of prioritizing economic interests over the promotion of human rights.¹⁹⁷

Latin America, during the Carter administration, proved to be a fertile ground for the implementation of United States foreign policy and the active and selective promotion of human rights, though often conditioned by geopolitical interests, to countries characterized by oppressive regimes. Professor Kathryn Sikkink's work takes an in-depth look at Carter's foreign policy toward nations such as Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Guatemala and El Salvador. Although many analysts and activists have criticized the human rights policy promoted by the Carter administration as ineffective, inconsistent, or even counterproductive, Professor Sikkink concludes that it is crucial to assess the impact of such policies in the long run, particularly in relation to the effects on the

¹⁹⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs*, p. 158.

¹⁹⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs*, p. 158.

¹⁹⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs*, p. 192.

¹⁹⁷ M. Franczak, "Human Rights and Basic Needs", p. 463.

democratization of these countries.¹⁹⁸ She argues, in fact, that a policy focused on human rights would tend to limit violations and indirectly contribute to democracy by withdrawing symbolic and material United States support for those authoritarian regimes.¹⁹⁹

Sikkink identifies two distinctive phases in the Carter administration's human rights policy: an active phase in 1977 and 1978, followed by a “disenchantment” phase in 1979 and 1980. During the first phase, members of the administration manifest significantly greater commitment to the human rights agenda. In these two years, Congress passes some of the most significant human rights laws, while the State Department develops executive instruments to ensure their implementation.²⁰⁰ The second phase, by contrast, is characterized by Carter’s growing interest in domestic issues, particularly the economy and preparations for the 1980 election campaign. Internationally, several events contributed to this shift in 1979: the victory of the Sandinistas against the Somoza regime in Nicaragua in July, the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, the capture of American hostages at the embassy in Tehran in November, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December.²⁰¹

The distinction between the two phases is evident in the results achieved in Latin America. In Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, the peak of human rights violations preceded or coincided with the active phase of human rights policy, which allowed for a strong United States policy response. In contrast, in Guatemala and El Salvador, the peak of repression coincided with a period of disenchantment; in these cases, as Sikkink stated, national security took precedence over human rights policy.²⁰² It is also reported that in the two countries where human rights policy has shown signs of ineffectiveness, different measures have been taken, with economic aid being suspended in Guatemala and increased in El Salvador. It is added that the failure of two such distinct approaches highlights the failure to prioritize human rights in both situations.²⁰³ Alter doesn’t point

¹⁹⁸ K. Sikkink, *Mixed Signals. U.S. Human Rights Policy and Latin America*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2004, p. 123.

¹⁹⁹ K. Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, p. 123.

²⁰⁰ K. Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, p. 123.

²⁰¹ K. Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, p. 124.

²⁰² K. Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, p. 125.

²⁰³ K. Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, p. 145.

to a real change in direction by the Carter administration; rather, he argues that Carter's emphasis on human rights never materialized into a truly structured and systematic policy. And after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the idea vanished permanently.²⁰⁴ He called the situation in El Salvador the most conspicuous failures of Carter's human rights policy, as the United States government supported a far-right *junta* at odds with revolutionary groups.²⁰⁵ In contrast, Professors David Schmitz and Vanessa Walker argue that Carter, throughout his mandate, maintained an enduring commitment to this policy, rejecting the calls for American intervention that had previously characterized relations with Central America. They also assert that there was constant tension and the need to balance human rights with other demands, but the policy was neither naive nor abandoned.²⁰⁶

Overall, Sikkink's study argues that, in the long run, Carter's policy proved significantly more effective than was recognized at the time. The Carter administration was notable for its success in promoting a human rights policy, initially tested by Congress, giving it the support and endorsement of the executive branch.²⁰⁷ Carter administration officials drafted and tested many of the policies that would later become the standard level for human rights in the United States and elsewhere. Sikkink attributes the failures associated with this policy to its innovative and pioneering nature, believing that most foreign service officials did not consider human rights an appropriate topic for foreign policy.²⁰⁸ In contrast, Alter argues that the cases of El Salvador and Guatemala demonstrate how an insistence on human rights was often not enough to stop officially sanctioned violence.²⁰⁹

According to Schmitz and Walker, the challenge Carter and his administration faced was the need to reconcile the goal of a human rights-focused foreign policy with the more pragmatic aspects of international relations. This implied that the administration had to deal not only with serious human rights violations, such as torture, murder and imprisonment of political dissidents, but also extend its attention to basic human needs as

²⁰⁴ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 369.

²⁰⁵ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 364.

²⁰⁶ D. F. Schmitz and V. Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights: The Development of a Post-Cold War Foreign Policy", *Diplomatic History*, vol. 28, n. 1, 2004, p. 137.

²⁰⁷ K. Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, p. 143.

²⁰⁸ K. Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, p. 144.

²⁰⁹ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 364.

well as civil and political liberties.²¹⁰ The potential risks associated with such a policy were extensively examined and classified into three categories. First, there was the risk of being accused of violating the sovereignty of other nations. Second, there was the danger of undermining overall efforts to promote human rights if expectations were overly high without tangible results, which could lead to a loss of confidence in human rights efforts. Finally, a human rights-oriented policy exposed the United States to criticism for inconsistency in policy implementation, accompanied by accusations of lack of balance.²¹¹ Like Sikkink, scholars believe such criticisms are unfounded and highlight the administration's courage in taking an innovative approach. The President and other senior officials were fully aware of the difficulties inherent in a foreign policy inspired by American ideals and human rights principles.²¹²

4. Views on Carter's Foreign Policy Action

The political successes have been multiple. As Franczak recalls, President Carter won the support of Latin American Democrats through the conclusion of the Panama Canal treaties and the reduction of aid to countries that violate human rights in the region. He brokered a peace between Egypt and Israel. It also facilitated China's global economic integration through official diplomatic recognition and a major economic agreement. However, criticism has intensified, particularly regarding the silence shown in the face of human rights violations in countries such as Iran, South Korea and China. It was pointed out that when Congress imposed limits or conditions on loans and arms sales that could have compromised diplomatic or economic interests, the State Department took action to protect national interests.²¹³ Alter, too, in his work "His Very Best," argued that the President's new policy would be selective and inconsistent, particularly when applied to strategically important allies, as vital interests would take priority over moral ones, citing the case of Iran as an example.²¹⁴

²¹⁰ D. F. Schmitz and V. Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights", p. 124.

²¹¹ D. F. Schmitz and V. Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights", p. 123.

²¹² D. F. Schmitz and V. Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights", p. 114.

²¹³ M. Franczak, "Human Rights and Basic Needs", p. 463.

²¹⁴ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 357.

Those praising the Carter administration's foreign policy include Professor Douglas Brinkley and Robert Strong. Brinkley highlights a number of significant successes and argues that, within the context of the Cold War, Carter's human rights policy gave the United States moral credibility globally and put the Soviet Union in the position of having to defend its domestic position.²¹⁵ Strong, while acknowledging that Carter changed his policy toward the Soviet Union mid-term from détente to confrontation, claim that there was an abandonment of human rights policy and a change of course in Carter's overall strategy.²¹⁶ However, Schmitz and Walker, points out that the prevailing consensus regarding Carter's foreign policy remains negative. In particular, historians Gaddis Smith and Burton Kaufman are cited. Smith states that the president sought to devise a new vision for foreign policy, moving away from the Cold War focus and pursuing a strategy focused on long-term benefits for the United States and the world. However, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 led, according to Smith, Carter to a radical shift in his foreign policy focus, dropping the focus on human rights and the multilateral approach and returning to orthodox positions typical of the Cold War.²¹⁷ Kaufman says his term in office has conveyed an image of a confused administration, increasingly divided, lacking leadership and uncertain about its goals and priorities. He believes that Carter "tried to do too much too fast" in international affairs and was inconsistent in his approach toward the Soviet Union and in the implementation of his human rights policy.²¹⁸ Finally, the aforementioned Rosati argues that Carter "attempted to implement the first post-Cold War foreign policy," based on "a strategy of adjustment and preventive diplomacy, a conception of complexity and interdependence, and the pursuit of human rights and the global community."^{219 220}

In conclusion, as desired to highlight, there remains considerable room for reflection regarding whether the policy under consideration can be considered a success or not; such conclusions may vary significantly from case to case and country to country. As Schmitz and Walker point out, it is crucial to move beyond accusations of weakness and naivete

²¹⁵ D. F. Schmitz and V. Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights", p. 114.

²¹⁶ D. F. Schmitz and V. Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights", p. 114.

²¹⁷ D. F. Schmitz and V. Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights", p. 115.

²¹⁸ D. F. Schmitz and V. Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights", p. 116.

²¹⁹ J. A. Rosati, "Jimmy Carter, a Man before His Time?", p. 462.

²²⁰ D. F. Schmitz and V. Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights", p. 116.

to focus on the actual implementation of the policy and its impact on United States interests. Some scholars, including Alter, Moyn, and Franczak, have interpreted the human rights policy as an attempt to mitigate the demands of the NIEO. Other academics, such as Schmitz, Walker and Sikkink, have acknowledged that the policy provided support for those abroad who were fighting against abusive and dictatorial governments with the goal of improving living conditions. It is also recognized that it represented the most significant change in post-Cold War foreign policymaking for the United States, rejecting the bipolar worldview characteristic of the containment doctrine and seeking to integrate American ideals into the formulation of the nation's foreign policy.²²¹ Although debates among scholars about Carter's foreign policy toward the NIEO continue to produce conflicting explanations, perhaps one of the most significant elements in understanding the limitations of his foreign policy lies in the internal dynamics within his own administration.

5. Jimmy Carter's Advisors

During the Carter administration, senior policymakers, particularly foreign policymakers, typically had conflicting ideas that played a key role in shaping the decision-making process. Such internal conflict within the administration would contribute to the impression of an idealistic presidency, but at the same time uncertain, indecisive and seemingly lacking in strategic integration.

Alter claims that all of Carter's actions during his last two years in office as governor were oriented toward his bid for the presidency.²²² In May 1973, Carter traveled to London, where David Rockefeller, Chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank, was gathering the founding members of the Trilateral Commission. This nongovernmental group was composed of political, business and academic leaders from North America, Western Europe and Japan, and met twice a year to discuss issues of global significance. At the suggestion of the commission's executive director, Zbigniew Brzezinski, a Polish Professor at Columbia University, the organization sought to include a governor from each political party. Carter was selected to serve as Democratic governor. His years on

²²¹ D. F. Schmitz and V. Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights", p. 143.

²²² J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 200.

this commission allowed him to get to know figures who would play significant roles in his administration, including Brzezinski himself, Cyrus Vance, Harold Brown, Michael Blumenthal and Walter Mondale.²²³

The Vice President for the entire term was Walter Fritz Mondale, Attorney General of the state of Minnesota from 1960 to 1964, when he was appointed Senator. Carter sought in his vice an individual who could compensate for his lack of experience in Washington.²²⁴ Carter stated that Mondale was personally the most compatible with him, and that they shared similar ideas on how to work together as a team.²²⁵ Regarding Mondale, Carter wrote that he was better prepared to answer questions than any other person, and that in one of their first meetings he appeared completely sincere in assessing his own strengths and weaknesses, as well as being extraordinarily straightforward in judging the qualities of the other people being considered for the vice presidency. Carter had a deep sense of trust in Mondale, being convinced of his independence and loyalty.²²⁶ Early in his senate career, Mondale's foreign policy focused on combating world hunger and the phenomenon of "brain drain," specifically the recruitment of educated individuals from developing countries to the United States. In this context, he introduced an amendment to allocate two hundred million dollars to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1968. Mondale argued that a world characterized by hunger, famine and conflict posed a real threat to global peace and consequently to United States national security. He stressed the importance of foreign assistance not being limited to sending material aid but instead focusing on promoting self-sufficiency in developing countries. He also added that the phenomenon of "brain drain" should be considered a national disgrace because it prevented developing countries from progressing toward self-reliance. At the end of his senatorial career, Mondale became a firm supporter of arms control. During debate on a budget bill for the Department of Defense, he strongly expressed his opposition to "first strike programs."²²⁷

²²³ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 200.

²²⁴ J. Carter, *White House Diary*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010, p. 5.

²²⁵ J. Carter, *White House Diary*, p. 5.

²²⁶ P. G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, p. 333.

²²⁷ Walter Mondale's biography in MinnesotaLaw.law.umn.edu (last consultation on 12 April 2025).

For the Treasury Department, President Carter chose Werner Michael Blumenthal, a Jewish refugee who later became CEO of the Bendix Corporation. For the Defense Department, the choice fell on Harold Brown, President of the California Institute of Technology.²²⁸ As has been repeatedly pointed out, in the late 1970s, Carter faced a period of considerable economic difficulty, marked by inflation and an energy crisis, as well as a perceived weakness in government administration. In July 1979, following the Camp David Retreat, Carter decided to attempt to revive his presidency through a review of key figures in his cabinet.²²⁹ From the reflections expressed by Carter himself in his “White House Diary,” it appears that Blumenthal’s decision to leave the government was shared and made by mutual agreement.²³⁰ However, Carter admitted that the management of this decision proved to be a mistake, as the announcement of the resignation of cabinet members was perceived as a crisis rather than an act of renewal and support.²³¹ Alter observes that the public perceived Blumenthal as selfish; people complained that when economic news was positive, he communicated it personally, while in the case of negative news, he left it to the White House to manage the consequences.²³² However, years later, Carter declared that he had no intention of allowing Blumenthal’s resignation.²³³ On the reshuffle of some cabinet members, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown stood out as one of the few to raise objections, claiming that Carter “was acting like Moses, breaking stone tablets, when he should have been aspiring to be Jesus.”²³⁴

The selection of the Central Intelligence Agency Director represented a particularly complex decision. George H. W. Bush, who held the position of CIA Director during the Gerald Ford administration, submitted his resignation upon Jimmy Carter’s inauguration, although he expressed a preference to remain in office. However, Carter wished to appoint his own CIA director. In place of Bush, in December, Carter chose Theodore Sorensen, who had been the principal political assistant and speechwriter for President John F. Kennedy. However, as Sorensen himself later acknowledged, CIA leadership was not the

²²⁸ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 292.

²²⁹ J. Carter, *White House Diary*, p. 341.

²³⁰ J. Carter, *White House Diary*, p. 346.

²³¹ J. Carter, *White House Diary*, p. 345.

²³² J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 473.

²³³ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 473.

²³⁴ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 472.

right position for him. In fact, Sorensen had served as a conscientious objector during World War II, which caused clamor at the idea of putting him in charge of an agency known for its intelligence operations.²³⁵ The role was eventually assigned to Admiral Stansfield Turner, Carter's former fellow student, who, by sacrificing his own popularity within the agency, would curtail covert operations.²³⁶ The relationship between Carter and the CIA Director suffered an inflection following the Iranian crisis, particularly because of the failure of American intelligence to predict the Iranian revolution and recognize the crucial role of Ayatollah Khomeini.²³⁷ Until August 1978, the CIA was convinced that Iran was in neither a revolutionary nor a pre-revolutionary condition. Turner later admitted that he had failed Carter by his actions.²³⁸ It is also widely acknowledged by authors such as Alter and Bourne that there was little or no understanding of Islamic fundamentalism in the United States government. Gary Sick, who dealt with the Iranian issue within the National Security Council under National Security Adviser Brzezinski, recalled a meeting in which Vice President Mondale addressed the CIA Director and asked, 'What is an Ayatollah?' to which Turner replied: 'I'm not sure I know.'²³⁹ ²⁴⁰

The main source of tension within the administration was the adversarial relationship between Secretary of State Cyrus Roberts Vance and National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski. Their divergent views regarding United States foreign policy led to frequent disagreements, which have not only been extensively documented in the relevant historiography but also emerge clearly from the writings and direct memories of the two protagonists.

Alter regards Cyrus Vance as the quintessential diplomat. His inclination toward negotiation rather than military action, coming from his experience during his term as Secretary of Defense in the Johnson administration in the context of the Vietnam War, helped reinforce Carter's approach. However, because Vance's worldview aligned so precisely with Carter's, the latter perceived that he was learning more from Professor

²³⁵ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 291.

²³⁶ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 292.

²³⁷ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 437.

²³⁸ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 438.

²³⁹ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 438.

²⁴⁰ P. G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, p. 454.

Brzezinski, who stimulated him with numerous ideas, most of which he rejected.²⁴¹ Alter claims that initially Vance and Brzezinski maintained a cordial relationship, but that, not long after Carter took office, this relationship began to deteriorate. A major cause of this change was Carter's growing obsession with foreign policy issues, which led Brzezinski to concurrently hold the roles of National Security Adviser formally and Secretary of State informally.²⁴² However, Alter recognizes that despite Brzezinski's victory over Vance and the resignation of the latter in 1980, Carter was too intelligent and independent to be influenced by them or anyone else.²⁴³

Bourne describes Brzezinski as the most talented and original foreign policy thinker of his generation.²⁴⁴ He argues that he had a clear and incisive way of dealing with problems that deeply fascinated Carter, and that, unlike Vance, he did not possess the caution characteristic of most diplomats. Contrary to Alter's assertion, Bourne notes that, despite Carter's determination to manage his foreign policy, he recognized in Brzezinski a figure capable of both instructing him and offering him a constant source of intellectual stimulation. Carter would have liked to have been able to select from Brzezinski's many proposals the best options for formulating his foreign policy decisions, and then draw on the expertise of Vance and the State Department to implement them.²⁴⁵ Like Kissinger, Brzezinski would have proved to be a person with a considerable ego and a tenacious political fighter, an aspect for which Carter was not fully prepared.²⁴⁶ Bourne states: "Brzezinski was a very disorienting presence in the White House," adding that "it was not possible to have a meeting with the president of the United States without him stepping in to whisper in the President's ear, just to show he knew how to do it."²⁴⁷ As argued by Alter, Bourne points out that during his tenure, Brzezinski would assume primary control of the foreign policy decision-making apparatus, marginalizing Vance's role and subverting Carter's original operational plan.²⁴⁸

²⁴¹ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 290.

²⁴² J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 291.

²⁴³ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 291.

²⁴⁴ P. G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, p. 379.

²⁴⁵ P. G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, p. 380.

²⁴⁶ P. G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, p. 380.

²⁴⁷ P. G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, p. 381.

²⁴⁸ P. G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, p. 381.

The issue concerning the Third World was of crucial importance in emerging global politics according to Brzezinski. Sargent reports that, according to Brzezinski, globalization, facilitated by improvements in communications and a growing sense of interdependence, was fueling a “global political awakening” through which developing countries were beginning to reclaim their basic rights.²⁴⁹ For Brzezinski, it was strategically necessary to find ways to meet Third World demands in order to preserve United States global influence.²⁵⁰ This vision exerted significant influence on the Carter administration, which implemented commodity agreements, resource transfers, tariff liberalization, and increased representation of developing countries within international organizations. However, internal resistance from Congress and the American public led Brzezinski, in June 1977, to advise Carter to pay more attention to political aspects:

“Our own public posture is in favor of doing more on the North-South front. In practice, this is difficult because other advanced countries as well as Congress are not particularly anxious to transfer more resources to the developing countries. Thus, perhaps, more emphasis ought to be put on political relationships.”²⁵¹

While Zbigniew Brzezinski emphasized the strategic importance of an approach toward the Third World, Cyrus Vance did not completely reject dialogue with such nations. However, he categorically rejected the notion of subverting the world order, proposing instead a dialogue based on ethical principles and cooperation in technology transfer. As Franczak reported, Secretary for Economic Affairs Richard Cooper pointed out that the United States, since 1974, had adopted a defensive stance toward the NIEO, seeking to maintain the existing economic order.²⁵² In this context, Cooper suggested to Vance an approach that emphasized the United States contribution in accordance with its core values, avoiding demands such as resource redistribution or debt relief.²⁵³ This new vision was formalized in March 1979 by Vance himself, during a speech entitled “America’s Commitment to Third World Development.” In that statement, Vance officially broke

²⁴⁹ D. J. Sargent, “North/South: The United States Responds”, p. 211.

²⁵⁰ D. J. Sargent, “North/South: The United States Responds”, p. 211.

²⁵¹ D. J. Sargent, “North/South: The United States Responds”, p. 216.

²⁵² M. Franczak, “Human Rights and Basic Needs”, p. 454.

²⁵³ M. Franczak, “Human Rights and Basic Needs”, p. 454.

away from the basic premises regarding the NIEO, focusing on concrete needs such as energy, food, health, and technology transfer.²⁵⁴ Vance stated:

“Our progress in North-South negotiations, our progress toward a more equitable and healthy new international economic order, will turn on our common ability to avoid endless debates on sterile texts and to focus instead on concrete development problems which we can tackle together, and which directly affect people’s lives.”²⁵⁵

One of the issues in which the two Carter aides confronted each other most intensely concerned the management of relations with the Soviet Union. For Carter, the main concern was to achieve a significant reduction in the number of nuclear weapons. Brzezinski, for his part, showed relatively little interest in nuclear weapons per se, but saw dialogue through SALT treaties as an opportunity to stop what he perceived as continued military buildup on the Soviet side. For him, it was a strategy to force the Soviets into a stark choice: “cooperation or confrontation.”²⁵⁶ The Soviets, however, had a deep distrust of Brzezinski. They were aware that he was a first-rate thinker and strategist, but they assumed that he was prone to an innate bias against them. Regardless of the context of the United States - Soviet relations, they were convinced that, having lived through the invasion of his homeland for eleven years, he, like many Poles, regarded the Soviet Union as an implacable enemy. Whatever decision Carter made, they always suspected Brzezinski’s Machiavellian interference behind the scenes.²⁵⁷ On the other hand, Vance was more interested in the broader issue of containing Soviet expansionism and moderating tensions.²⁵⁸

While Brzezinski tried to pursue contradictory goals, he simultaneously sought to reform, negotiate, and ignore the Soviet Union.²⁵⁹ Vance’s approach aimed to negotiate with the Soviets to reduce the risks of nuclear war.²⁶⁰ Historian Gaddis points out that the tension between the two was tangible, to the point that on 7 June 1976, a speech by Carter for the

²⁵⁴ M. Franczak, “Human Rights and Basic Needs”, p. 455.

²⁵⁵ M. Franczak, “Human Rights and Basic Needs”, p. 455.

²⁵⁶ P. G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, p. 388.

²⁵⁷ P. G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, p. 386.

²⁵⁸ P. G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, p. 388.

²⁵⁹ J. L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment. A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 346.

²⁶⁰ J. L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, p. 346.

United States Naval Academy turned out to be so disjointed that people believed the president had simply pinned Brzezinski's and Vance's drafts together.²⁶¹ Brzezinski and the National Security Council favored a hard line toward the Soviet Union, even at the cost of delaying the SALT II treaty. While Vance and the State Department stressed the need to continue negotiations.²⁶² The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan ended the debate, leaving the administration with little alternative but to withdraw the SALT II treaty from the Senate and suspend any further steps toward détente.²⁶³

As reported in a New York Times article written on 25 May 1983 by Bernard Gwertzman, the differences between the two were also highlighted in their memoirs. Both Mr. Brzezinski and Mr. Vance agree on the nature of their policy differences, which centered primarily on how to deal with the Soviet Union; these differences were then also reflected in areas such as China, Africa, arms control and, ultimately, the Iran crisis. Gwertzman points out that while Brzezinski, in his book "Power and Principle," is very direct and critical of Vance, the Secretary of State, instead, in his volume "Hard Choices," initially comes across as open-minded. When asked by Carter about possible objections to Brzezinski's appointment, Vance replied: "I don't know Brzezinski well, but I believe we could work together."²⁶⁴ He posed, however, the explicit condition that he would serve as the president's spokesman in relation to foreign policy.²⁶⁵ However, he later denounced Brzezinski's behavior, accusing him precisely of wanting to take control of official foreign policy communication: "Despite his stated acceptance of this principle, and in spite of repeated instructions from the President, Brzezinski would attempt increasingly to take the role of policy spokesman."²⁶⁶ And he argued that his attitude "became a political liability, leaving the Congress and foreign governments with the impression that the administration did not know its own mind."²⁶⁷

Even in the area of human rights, the foundation of foreign policy, there was no shortage of opposition within Carter's team. In the area of human rights, widely promoted by

²⁶¹ J. L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, p. 347.

²⁶² J. L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, p. 348.

²⁶³ J. L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, p. 349.

²⁶⁴ C. R. Vance, *Hard Choices*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1983, p. 34.

²⁶⁵ C. R. Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 34.

²⁶⁶ C. R. Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 35.

²⁶⁷ C. R. Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 36.

Vance, Carter founded a new State Department Office of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, which published “country reports” to monitor the behavior of violent governments. To manage the office, Carter and Vance established a new position, that of Assistant Secretary for human rights, and gave the job to Patricia “Patt” Derian, an activist of unusual vision and determination who had moved to Mississippi in 1959 to work for civil rights. Vance empowered Derian, but she clashed with the department’s other aides, who championed human rights but prioritized outdated strategic goals and foreign arms sales.²⁶⁸ Alter reported that Derian was often frustrated by the lack of support from the State Department and the White House.²⁶⁹

It is thus emphasized that the Carter administration was deeply marked by disagreements, which, as scholars point out, contributed to weakening his policies and making them ineffective and naive in the eyes of the public. As Vernon Jordan, executive director of the Urban League and informal adviser and friend of the President, regretfully pointed out: “We almost tried to duplicate in the administration the chaos and the fragmentation that existed in the party.”²⁷⁰

In conclusion, this chapter analyzed Carter’s approach to the New International Economic Order, with a focus on human rights and basic needs. Carter’s reasons for adopting such an orientation were examined, highlighting the significant differences from the policy pursued by Kissinger in previous years. The composition of Jimmy Carter’s team, characterized by deep disagreements on various issues, was also presented, which contributed to the ineffectiveness of his policy in the eyes of many observers. The chapter also gathered a repertoire of opinions, both favorable and unfavorable, expressed by historians regarding Carter’s actions. The next chapter will be devoted to examining and comparing historiographical positions in relation to the NIEO.

²⁶⁸ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 361.

²⁶⁹ J. Alter, *His Very Best*, p. 362.

²⁷⁰ P. G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, p. 367.

Chapter 3

The Carter Administration and the NIEO: Promises and Ambiguities

The chapter examines texts concerning Carter's reaction to the NIEO. In particular, the contributions of researcher Courtney Hercus and the previously mentioned scholars Franczak and Sargent are examined. Initially, an attempt will be made to understand how Carter's initial openness relates to the global debate on rebalancing the global North and South; the economic significance behind the desire for openness, cooperation, and interdependence; and how basic human needs were a strategic response to the NIEO. Next, the foreign policy promoted by Jimmy Carter towards the Third World is examined, with a focus on Latin America, the geographical context in which, due to several circumstances, Carter managed to apply his policy in the way he had conceived it. The purpose is to highlight why Latin America provided a favorable context for the implementation of human rights policy, what measures were taken by the United States president, and what were the limitations and contradictions in the implementation of that policy. Finally, the shortcomings in Carter's intentions and the reasons behind them are highlighted. The chapter also examines how the failure to implement his foreign policy conception, or its strategic implementation based on achieving basic human needs, facilitated the spread of neoliberal ideology, advocated by his successor Ronald Reagan, and the conclusion of the NIEO. Rather, his goal of effecting change, compared to his predecessors, will result in creating a bond of continuity with his Republican successor.

1. Carter's Initial Opening

According to a well-established view, Carter's approach to the NIEO was based on the idea of interdependence. Franczak argues that interdependence, defined as the interplay between traditional security purposes and foreign economic policy, was the main focus that distinguished Carter's personality both before and during his term.²⁷¹ Carter's conception of foreign policy was an intricate system in which economic stability, human rights and development were central to the security and well-being of the United States. The concept of interdependence evolved in the 1960s, and the ideas behind it recognized

²⁷¹ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality and American Foreign Policy in the 1970s*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2022, p. 97.

economic tensions between the United States, Europe and Japan as a danger to the stability of the Western alliance.²⁷² In the 1970s, following the oil crisis of 1973 and the proclamation of the NIEO at the United Nations the following year, the concept expanded to include not only transatlantic relations but also the relationship between the global North and South. Kissinger was forced to recognize the emergence of a “new age of interdependence” in which “inflation and the threat of global decline hang over the economies of rich and poor alike.”²⁷³ When Carter launched his campaign for the democratic nomination, both advanced and developing nations were discussing interdependence between rich and poor countries, North and South, in an unprecedented and significant way. To understand Carter’s approach to the Third World, it is essential to analyze the underlying context and how interdependence gained importance during the 1970s.²⁷⁴

In 1972, David Rockefeller, managing director of Chase Manhattan Bank, fearing that Nixon’s foreign policy decisions might undermine economic ties between the United States, Japan and Europe, established an elite group known as the Trilateral Commission. This initiative was primarily aimed at supporting the management of advanced economies, a privilege and an assigned practice of the global North.²⁷⁵ According to the professor Stephen Gills, the first goal of the commission was “to involve significant groups of leaders from the three areas in working together on matters of common concern to lessen communications breakdowns and to develop a shared understanding of common problems.”²⁷⁶ Others objectives of the Commission were “to foster understanding and support of Commission recommendations both in governmental and private sectors in the three regions,” and “to propose policies which the Trilateral states could follow, particularly in the economic, political and military fields, with respect to each other, the

²⁷² M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 97.

²⁷³ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 97.

²⁷⁴ In 1977 Keohane and Nye’s *Power and interdependence* was published, which serves as an intellectual reference on the concept of interdependence. In the academic definition in the book, interdependence refers to situations characterized by reciprocal effects among countries or among actors in different countries. R. O. Keohane and J. S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*, Boston, Little Brown, 1977, p. 8.

²⁷⁵ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 99.

²⁷⁶ S. Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 143.

developing nations and communist states.”²⁷⁷ This last point holds the key to understanding the Commission’s approach to the global South. The goal was to develop policies capable of guiding the trilateral nations when they were interacting with developing countries. Even if they could not agree on an activity to be carried out, they were able to “agree on certain things which ought not to be done.” The Commission would also suggest ways to address shared domestic problems to ensure that domestic policies do not create impediments to effective cooperation.²⁷⁸

Indeed, after 1973, the Commission’s focus shifted to issues concerning the link between the North and the South, including energy, natural resources, trade, finance and international institutions.²⁷⁹ Specifically, the Commission suggested a cooperative arrangement between the trilateral countries and OPEC, with each country contributing one point five billion dollars to a special action fund designed to address urgent needs in the Fourth World. However, the fund was never established; instead, Kissinger, during the World Food Conference in November 1974, presented a substantially more limited and less funded fund, namely the International Fund for Agricultural Development, which did not become operational until 1977.²⁸⁰ Another proposal put forward by the Commission in 1975 to support the Fourth World was to reuse OPEC’s financial surplus, held at commercial banks in New York, Paris and London, through a facility called the “third window” of the World Bank. This facility would have offered loans in terms between those of normal World Bank lending operations (first window) and those of the International Development Association (second window). The initiative was never successful, partly because the Ford administration did not support the process.²⁸¹ In other words, the Commission recommended joint action to increase aid to developing countries, greater international monetary cooperation to help recycle the OPEC surpluses resulting from the increase in oil prices, the promotion of the unity of the Trilateral member states in the context of a cooperative and non-confrontational approach to OPEC, the reform of

²⁷⁷ S. Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*, p. 143.

²⁷⁸ S. Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*, p. 143.

²⁷⁹ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 100.

²⁸⁰ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 100.

²⁸¹ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 101.

the international trading system in a more market-oriented direction. In these debates were implicit severe criticism of Nixon's policies.²⁸²

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it was Zbigniew Brzezinski who strongly wanted democrat Carter on the Commission.²⁸³ The relationship between the two was close from the start, as Carter recalled in his memoirs: "I became an eager student and took full advantage of what Brzezinski had to offer. We got to know each other well."²⁸⁴ The impact of the Trilateral Commission on Carter's election campaign and presidency was significant. Analyzing Carter's recollections of the campaign against Ford, when Brzezinski was still head of the Commission, the impact the latter had becomes clear: "I would study [Brzezinski's] position papers on foreign affairs in order to develop my answers to those questions all candidates had to face."²⁸⁵ In addition, he emphasized that his proximity to the Commission provided him not only with the opportunity to meet national and international leaders in various fields of study related to foreign affairs, but also to connect with and receive support from prominent members who are experts in interdependence issues. Members who, after his election will be invited to work with him in the State Department or the National Security Council.²⁸⁶

As is well known to Carter administration specialists, in December 1975, Carter requested Brzezinski to draft a document concerning foreign policy. This began to define the priorities of the future administration, which turned out to be consistent with those of the Trilateral Commission. Points considered essential by Brzezinski included: cooperation among the advanced industrial democracies; establishing stronger relations between the North and the South, working with developing countries and supporting poorer countries; and, finally, promoting a policy of détente toward the Soviet Union.²⁸⁷ The second aspect of greater importance to the topic is described by Brzezinski. He claims that aid would have been targeted to the poorest countries with the serious humanitarian problems, while the United States position in the dialogue between North and South could have been strengthened by developing bilateral relations with the most prosperous and successful

²⁸² S. Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*, p. 175.

²⁸³ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 102.

²⁸⁴ J. Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*, New York, Bantam Books, 1982, p. 51.

²⁸⁵ J. Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 51.

²⁸⁶ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 103.

²⁸⁷ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 103.

developing countries, as the latter had the greatest interest in maintaining economic stability internationally.²⁸⁸

In June 1976 Carter gave a foreign policy speech to the Foreign Policy Association in New York, largely containing Brzezinski's priorities. Carter also added the Trilateral Commission's plans for OECD-OPEC cooperation on increasing multilateral aid, as well as a global development budget within the World Bank, which would become a feature of G7 discussions during his administration.²⁸⁹ Franczak points out that although the idea of providing aid to the Fourth World was strongly supported by Brzezinski, it originated primarily from the Overseas Development Council, a think tank founded to meet basic human needs in the poorest countries. Carter's vision included this availability to the poorest nations and suggested collaboration among multiple countries, with the goal of supporting those in real need and not the elites of developing countries.²⁹⁰

The Overseas Development Council had been created in Washington in 1969 by James Pineo Grant, a former executive of the United States Agency for International Development, with the goal of increasing public and congressional support for more multilateral development aid at a time when United States contributions were in steep decline.²⁹¹ In the 1960s, the development process was indeed at risk because of the modernization paradigm. This model was based on major infrastructure works, the use of foreign technologies, and the spread of cultural values of the West. This development toward capitalism was supported by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, who believed that modernization would prevent Third World nations from moving closer to communism. On the contrary, ideas associated with Prebisch's dependency theory, which highlighted the injustices of global trade and finance regulations, were reinforced in Third World countries.²⁹² By the end of the 1960s economic inequality between North and South had increased, and in 1971 Grant recognized that United States aid was insufficient to ensure the stability of developing countries that were experiencing a growing demand for progress from their populations, and wrote that: "something more fundamental than

²⁸⁸ Z. Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, p. 7.

²⁸⁹ U.S. Department of State, "Foundations of Foreign Policy", 2014, declassified, U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, FRUS, vol. I, p. 28. [History.State.gov](https://history.state.gov)

²⁹⁰ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 104.

²⁹¹ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 104.

²⁹² M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 105.

[United States] aid is required.”²⁹³ It was at that time that Grant proposed a strategy that would go beyond gross domestic production, industrialization, and other measures of modernization and toward more basic, people-oriented indicators such as access to health care, education, shelter, and food, known as basic human needs.²⁹⁴

Carter’s relationship with the ODC began in 1974 through his friendship with one of its founders, Theodore Hesburgh, rector of the University of Notre Dame from 1952 to 1987. Franczak asserts that Hesburgh was a significant ethical influence on Carter and, presumably, the entire country, translating the ODC’s policy goals into moral language accessible to Americans.²⁹⁵ Hesburgh considered human rights to be inseparable from development and perceived development achievable through the satisfaction of basic human needs. The fusion of liberal idealism and Christian political commitment was fascinating to Carter. During the foreign policy confrontation against Ford in October 1976, Carter accused him and Kissinger of a lack of morality because they had not dedicated themselves to securing an increase in food aid at the World Food Conference. That morality that he greatly appreciated in Hesburgh.²⁹⁶ And he claimed that “Strength derives from doing what’s right: caring for the poor, providing food, becoming the breadbasket of the world.”²⁹⁷

As noted in earlier chapters, Carter presented the first human rights speech of his presidency during the graduation ceremony for Notre Dame’s class of 1977. According to Franczak, Carter presented his foreign policy vision regarding developing countries, which combined the strategies of the ODC and the Trilateral Commission.²⁹⁸ The question of whether the foreign policy, elaborated by the ambitions of these two groups active in the field, toward the Third World has produced significant transformations is a matter of debate. Franczak, in relation to these two pillars toward the Global South, points out that McGuire and Ruttan, authors of a comprehensive 1989 review of US foreign aid, concluded that: “the Carter administration and the Congress soon began to reallocate

²⁹³ E. H. Berman, *Influence of the Ford, Rockefeller, and Carnegie Foundations*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1984, p. 140.

²⁹⁴ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 109.

²⁹⁵ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 111.

²⁹⁶ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 112.

²⁹⁷ The Second Ford-Carter Presidential Debate, 6 October 1976. Debates.org

²⁹⁸ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 113.

resources away from basic human needs to more United States security-dominated interests; and they regarded with skepticism the value to the United States of multilateral development assistance.”²⁹⁹

In an effort to develop a more specific North-South strategy, in 1977 the PRM-8 was created with the goal of establishing medium and long-term policies to reform political and economic relations with the South. This study was coordinated by the North-South Group, composed of notable academics including Roger Hansen and Robert Pastor, in January 1977. However, Franczak reports that the initiative was undermined by internal conflicts within the group.³⁰⁰ Scholar and historian Courtney Hercus sees PRM-8, drafted by Zbigniew Brzezinski and Samuel Huntington, as a fundamental document for understanding Carter’s turn in form, but relatively weak in content toward the NIEO.³⁰¹ From the very first lines it can be seen a departure from the modus operandi of Kissinger and Ford and reads: “The United States has to help in the shaping of a new international system that cannot be confined to the developed countries but must involve increasingly the entire international community of more than one hundred and fifty nation states.”³⁰² Indeed, as Franczak claims, from the very beginning of his term, Carter’s administration sought to move away from the lack of morality that, in his view, distinguished Nixon and Ford. Brzezinski, highlighting the positive architectural side of Carter’s policy focused on creating new global relations. He described this policy as characterized by “Constructive global engagement.”³⁰³ According to Franczak, in its first year the administration successfully pursued its political goals in the Third World, the most important being resolution of the Panama Canal Treaties, but it failed to secure an agreement with developing countries on energy at the Conference on International Economic Cooperation. In addition, Carter has been committed to the promotion of basic human needs and the creation of programs to combat poverty.³⁰⁴ However, the National Security Council admitted that most policy focused on isolated initiatives and stressed the

²⁹⁹ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 110. See also: M. F. McGuire and V. W. Ruttan, “U.S. Foreign Assistance Policy since New Directions”, *The Journal of Developing Areas*, vol. 24, n. 2, 1990, p. 127-180.

³⁰⁰ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 149.

³⁰¹ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights: The Non-Aligned Movement, Jimmy Carter, and Neoliberalism*, London, The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2019, p. 138.

³⁰² C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 138.

³⁰³ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 147.

³⁰⁴ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 148.

need for a comprehensive and balanced response, including not only anti-poverty aid but also structural reforms and major changes in United States trade policy.³⁰⁵ According to Hercus, the centrality of human rights in PRM-8 is strategically defined as: “a goal that cross-cuts our relations with the Soviet Union, the developing countries, and particularly the regional influentials.”³⁰⁶ As also pointed out by Franczak, attempts are being made to build new diplomatic relations based on an element of “soft power,” indeed, the authors of PRM-8 state: “unlike the years 1945-50, this calls not for American dictation but for more subtle inspiration and cooperative leadership on a much wider front.”³⁰⁷ Hercus and Franczak recognized the importance of the document, but both pointed out its lack of concreteness. Moreover, Franczak stresses the fact that its implementation was severely limited by internal disagreements.³⁰⁸

The promotion of the NIEO represented the peak of solidarity between the G77 and the Non-Aligned Movement countries. This context was preceded by years where the United States stance toward the Non-Aligned Movement was disinterested. The State Department’s confidential memorandum “Interagency Review of U.S. Policy Towards the Non-Aligned Movement,” drafted in 1979 by a committee that included the State Department, CIA, Treasury Department, AID, ICA, and Defense Department, denounced the United States negligent error between 1965 and 1974:

“From 1965 to 1974, the US sent no observers to non-aligned meetings, levelled no special reporting requirements on its missions in NAM member countries, sent no presidential messages to NAM summits and did not attempt to influence or rebut NAM declarations and/or resolutions. This policy of calculated neglect lasted until our head-on collision with the LDCs at the Sixth Special UNGA Session on Raw Materials and Development in 1974. The session left the US isolated diplomatically even from many of the Western Europeans.”³⁰⁹

It was against this backdrop of rising tensions and diplomatic isolation that the Carter administration sought to reshape North-South relations. In October 1977 Carter signed a

³⁰⁵ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 148.

³⁰⁶ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 138.

³⁰⁷ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 138.

³⁰⁸ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 149.

³⁰⁹ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 128.

Presidential Directive for North-South relations. The text declared that: “Trade, access to capital markets, and foreign assistance [are] the leading edge of our strategy, since these policies maximize the role of market forces and most efficiently promote development.” It also set various goals to be achieved in the Third World, including restricting the arms trade, regulating nuclear technology, and enhancing human rights and basic needs.³¹⁰ Three events marked 1977, making it crucial for human rights: the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Amnesty International, the election of President Carter, and General Assembly Resolution 32/130, passed in December 1977, which emphasizes and strengthens the link between human rights and economic development. Point f of the resolution highlights: “the realization of the new international economic order is an essential element for the effective promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms and should also be accorded priority.”³¹¹ Apparently Carter, wishing to initiate a new phase, has promoted an opening to the Third World.

However, despite Carter’s open attitude shown from the beginning of the term, Franczak, considering the discussions in the UN General Assembly and UNCTAD, recognized that the administration’s position was dismissive if not hostile.³¹² Southern leaders did not refrain from showing their dissatisfaction with the administration’s uncooperative attitude regarding the negotiations, so much so that Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez expressed his disagreement by stating that also the CIEC had not produced significant results.³¹³ The same thought was held by Jamaican prime minister Michael Manley who reiterated the need for a Common Fund, a transfer of resources, IMF reform and debt restructuring.³¹⁴ The main criticism levelled at Carter at the time, Franczak says, was that he had not done more than his predecessors to change the dialogue agenda. Even members of the North-South Group admitted the United States determination to limit not only demands from the South but also to discourage initiatives from Europe.³¹⁵ In 1979, Carter

³¹⁰ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 149.

³¹¹ United Nations General Assembly, “Alternative Approaches and Ways and Means within the United Nations System for Improving the Effective Enjoyment of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms”, Resolution 32/130, 1977. UN.org

³¹² M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 149.

³¹³ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 150.

³¹⁴ U.S. Department of State, “Foreign Economic Policy”, 2013, declassified, U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, FRUS, vol. III, p. 971. History.State.gov

³¹⁵ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 151.

decided to remove from the dialogue negotiations that dealt with economic redistributions, focusing only on the point he believed the United States' strongest: "moral and humane values and technological prowess."³¹⁶

Hercus, in her volume "The Struggle Over Human Rights," employs empirical evidence to illustrate how the Carter administration altered the approach to human rights and adapted it to G77 actions. Hercus, analyzing declassified records between 2005 and 2013, archival sources from the Carter Presidential Library and State Department documents, argues that from the beginning of his tenure Carter perceived the Third World as a threat to diplomatic relations and the international economic order. According to Hercus, Carter attempted to respond to demands for changes and to the threat through morality and human rights. But the centrality of human rights proved to be ambiguous and strategic, especially in relation to the Third World.

In a memorandum regarding the NIEO from Assistant Secretary of State Warren Christopher to the President dated 1977 in preparation for a meeting with the Secretary General of the United Nations, the slow and rigid approach to the NIEO is acknowledged:

"The US strategy at the Seventh Special Session largely centered on proposals that did not require new sums of money or Congressional action. In areas where either or both were required - foreign aid, further trade liberalization, new contributions to the World Bank, commodity agreements - progress has been very slow."³¹⁷

Developing countries were disappointed, and, on the same memorandum, it says: "the less developed countries are increasingly critical of the slow rate of progress, and their frustration and discontent could again reach confrontational proportions."³¹⁸ The author strongly points out that, in its foreign policy, the Carter administration was committed to establishing a trade-off between appeasement, concessions and especially the defense of United States economic and political interests.³¹⁹ And, in an effort to promote relations with developing countries and maintain the status quo, the Central Intelligence Agency National Foreign Assessment Center noted in a 1978 memo that: "less developed

³¹⁶ U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Economic Policy", 2013, declassified, U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, FRUS, vol. III, p. 999. History.State.gov

³¹⁷ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 131.

³¹⁸ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 131.

³¹⁹ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 132.

countries' needs are as unlikely to be met by this United States administration as by its predecessors."³²⁰

According to politician Sandra Louise Vogelgesang in "American Dream, Global Nightmare," the focus on human rights marked a courageous beginning by the Carter administration, yet she pointed out its failure to fully achieve them.³²¹ Whereas during the Nixon-Ford administration, led by the strong personality of Kissinger, the executive branch's approach to human rights was defensive, and opposed to openly including human rights in the diplomacy, with the arrival of Carter, the United States adopted a more moral and systematic tone toward human rights, thanks in part to the *ad hoc* Christopher Group interagency to analyze and decide on the link between economic assistance and human rights.³²² The limitation referred to the economic aspect. Congress, beginning in the second half of the 1970s, started to introduce human rights clauses in almost all foreign economic legislation. The Amendment to the Export-Import Act that became law in 1977, as did the Overseas Private Investment Corporation the following year, tied loans to an assessment of the state of human rights in the country. In addition, an amendment to the Bretton Woods Agreements Act of 1978 called for the inclusion of human rights criteria in IMF loans.³²³

Despite the desire for change and detachment from previous administrations, there were initiatives that can be considered "apparent openness." Among these, Hercus highlights an aspect already mentioned in the previous chapter concerning the definition of human rights and basic human needs found in the PRM-28. This memorandum makes explicit the hierarchy among the different categories of human rights (civil and political rights, economic and social rights, and civil liberties). Indeed, the second group, essential to the Third World, is formally recognized but in reality subordinate to the other two.³²⁴ As Hercus points out, while full support for Third World demands in the NIEO would result in the loss of United States economic dominance; diplomatically, the appearance of denigrating and subordinating economic rights to civil and political rights could have

³²⁰ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 131.

³²¹ S. Vogelgesang, *American Dream Global Nightmare: The Dilemma of U.S. Human Rights Policy*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1980, p. 184.

³²² S. Vogelgesang, *American Dream Global Nightmare*, pp. 206-207.

³²³ S. Vogelgesang, *American Dream Global Nightmare*, pp. 209.

³²⁴ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 147.

been disastrous.³²⁵ Vogelgesang critically argues that: “the emphasis on economic and social rights may have emerged more by accident than design.”³²⁶ The importance of appearance in promoting relations with the Third World was underscored by the following quote from a confidential memo: “we have to be careful not to appear to be so rigid on political rights that we appear to deny pressing socioeconomic rights.”³²⁷ However, as shown in the following paragraphs, according to Hercus the subordination of economic and social rights brings Carter closer to his successor.

As reported by Vogelgesang, many scholars and politicians criticize the inclusion of economic rights as “human rights.” Maurice Cranston, for example, argues that if the Universal Declaration were overloaded with statements about so-called human rights, it would risk turning human rights into “utopian aspirations.”³²⁸ Vernon Van Dyke distinguishes between “absolute rights that can be declared and enforced by law” (civil and political rights) and ideals that require time and resources (economic and social rights). The latter are “non-justiciable or programmatic rights,” that is, they cannot be guaranteed immediately, but only progressively through state policies.³²⁹ In this regard, the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights requires “immediate” obligations, while the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights commits states to “take steps to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights.”³³⁰ According to the author, this reflects the idea that such rights are an ideal to be achieved over time, the very point implicit in the program of the Carter administration. Against the opinion of these critics, she argues that civil, political, economic and social rights are interconnected and must be promoted together. However, the lack of internal agreement in the Congress and reluctance to ratify international treaties limits the credibility of United States leadership.³³¹

³²⁵ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 133.

³²⁶ S. Vogelgesang, *American Dream Global Nightmare*, p. 184.

³²⁷ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 143.

³²⁸ S. Vogelgesang, *American Dream Global Nightmare*, p. 190.

³²⁹ S. Vogelgesang, *American Dream Global Nightmare*, p. 191.

³³⁰ S. Vogelgesang, *American Dream Global Nightmare*, p. 192.

³³¹ S. Vogelgesang, *American Dream Global Nightmare*, p. 187.

Although Carter's government may seem characterized by genuine intentions to initiate a new phase in ties with the Global South, as Franczak notes, such initiatives were often chaotic, obstructed from within and lacking political support. While Franczak sees the importance of human rights by virtue of Carter's deep spirituality and morality, Hercus' work identifies from the beginning of his administration a strategy aimed at countering the NIEO, seen as a threat, and an unwavering commitment to maintaining the existing world economic order. It is thus shown that the Carter administration, while supporting human rights in theory, has often opposed their application in the economic field. While committing to uphold all the rights listed in the United Nations Universal Declaration, in practice the Carter administration has primarily prioritized personal security, protesting torture, murder, and detention, while spokesmen for Third World governments call for a transfer of resources. On the one hand, Third World leaders interpreted United States efforts to emphasize the basic human needs of the poorest citizens of developing countries as a threat to their power and a gimmick to obstruct the economic development of their nations. On the other hand, the administration distrusted the motives of those who wanted the resources of rich nations without committing themselves to helping the poorest citizens.³³² Vogelgesang says the administration would not have given support to the NIEO unless it had certainty about the intentions of developing nations. There was concern that aid resources were controlled only by corrupt elites.³³³

2. Application of Carter's Policy in Latin America and Limited Actions

As is widely recognized, Jimmy Carter presented himself to the American people as an outsider, the one who should have led the country towards a moral rebirth, proposing a foreign policy based on human rights, ethics, and more just international cooperation. However, as already pointed out above, his ambitious vision was confronted with the return of the logic of the Cold War, that forced him to follow a more traditional security agenda while returning the dynamics of competition between superpowers and geopolitical balance of power.³³⁴ Only in Latin America Carter was able to implement his

³³² S. Vogelgesang, *American Dream Global Nightmare*, p. 251.

³³³ S. Vogelgesang, *American Dream Global Nightmare*, p. 249-250.

³³⁴ R. A. Pastor, *Exiting the Whirlpool: U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Latin America and the Caribbean*, Oxford, Westview Press, 2001, P. 40.

policy as he had conceived it. In this regional context, the political project of the administration could really develop.

Pastor recognizes a deep personal interest of Carter in the region, as he spoke some Spanish and had traveled privately or as governor to Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Argentina and Costa Rica.³³⁵ This passion was combined with a favorable historical period, marked by democratic ferment and greater regional autonomy. As suggested in the chapter two, Latin America in the 1970s was a bleak time for human rights.³³⁶ There were indeed many dictatorial military regimes that systematically violated human rights (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay), yet these were not closed regimes, but rather willing to maintain relations with other actors in the international system. In contrast, the region's democratic partners (Venezuela and Costa Rica) could prove to be a useful tool and ally.³³⁷ Sargent, in fact, includes this attitude of "openness" among the reasons why Latin America was fundamental to human rights and for Carter.³³⁸ In this context, Carter supported a program aligned with the values of his presidency: human rights, promotion of democracy, opposition to unilateral intervention, encouragement of multilateralism and global economic reforms.

Another motivation concerns the active engagement of Amnesty International and other local activists in the fight against human rights abuses.³³⁹ Franczak also highlights Latin American figures who, since the 1950s and 1960s, have worked for a more just global economic system, such as Raúl Prebisch at ECLA and Luis Echeverría at the United Nations.³⁴⁰

The economic aspect also proved essential. By January 1978, the United States had opposed, on human rights grounds, twenty-two loans made to international financial institutions in Latin America, seven in Africa and only four in East Asia.³⁴¹ According to

³³⁵ R. A. Pastor, *Exiting the Whirlpool*, p. 40.

³³⁶ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 255.

³³⁷ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 134.

³³⁸ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 255.

³³⁹ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 255.

³⁴⁰ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 119.

³⁴¹ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 256.

Sargent, this meant that the countervailing costs “to other American interests” were calculated to be lower than elsewhere.³⁴²

The most cited reason was that Carter, rejecting the Monroe Doctrine,³⁴³ aimed to improve relations between the United States and Latin America. The culmination of this easing of relations came with the Panama Canal Treaties of 1977, which committed the United States to restoring Panamanian sovereignty over the Canal Zone, a United States overseas territory since 1903.³⁴⁴ All these reasons made Latin America an ideal stage and a symbolic priority for Carter.

In addition to moralistic rhetoric, among the measures taken by the Carter administration to support its pro-human rights policy were official statements of condemnation and diplomatic pressure. In April 1977, during his address to the Organization of American States, Carter stated:

“I will be particularly concerned that we not seek to divide the nations of Latin America one from another or to set Latin America apart from the rest of the world. Our own goal is to address problems in a way which will lead to productive solutions - globally, regionally, and bilaterally.”³⁴⁵

Concrete pro-development initiatives in the Latin American region mentioned in the speech included: the establishment of a Common Fund for Commodities; the redirection of bilateral aid to poorer countries, increasing contributions to multilateral financial institutions for more advanced developing countries; greater flexibility in foreign investment regulations; support for regional and subregional economic integration; special treatment for developing countries in GATT negotiations; support for regional and subregional economic integration; and, finally, conventional arms reduction and nuclear resource sharing arrangements.³⁴⁶ In June of that year Cyrus Vance, at the next meeting of the OAS, introduced a resolution declaring that torture, summary executions, or

³⁴² D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 256.

³⁴³ The Monroe Doctrine (1823) stated that the Western Hemisphere was now precluded from further colonization by European powers and that any attempt at European intervention would be considered a hostile act against the United States. Archives.gov

³⁴⁴ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 256.

³⁴⁵ J. Carter, “Organization of the American States Address before the Permanent Council”, 14 April 1977. TheAmericanPresidencyProject.ucsb.edu

³⁴⁶ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 131.

prolonged detention without trial can never be justified.³⁴⁷ Sargent argues that, shortly, the human rights confrontation became more intense as action began to take place. However, Franczak says that the main economic initiatives of Carter's comprehensive approach toward Latin America would take place outside of United States meetings. It is important to remember that the developed countries gave their official consent to the negotiations for the Common Fund during the CIEC, which closed in June 1977; thereafter, negotiations regarding the Common Fund were pursued over the next two years by a UNCTAD special committee. Regarding the support for basic human needs communicated by Secretary Vance, its concrete implementation was obstructed by both Congress and the administration when political events in the Third World (such as in Iran) led to a reassertion of Cold War priorities, as will later be demonstrated.³⁴⁸ Sargent, however, offers an in-depth narrative only about the last of Carter's promises, namely the ban on the supply of military items to Argentina, Chile and various Central American states. Analysis of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's arms trade databases indicates that the value of military sales and grants provided by the United States to Chile declined from three hundred and forty-seven millions of dollars in 1976 to only eighteen million in 1980. During the same period, military trade transactions with Argentina decreased from two hundred and ninety-four millions of dollars to one hundred and twenty-five million.³⁴⁹

A distinction among Latin American leaders is attributed to Carlos Andrés Pérez, president of Venezuela from 1974 to 1979, who became the main representative and supporter of Carter's vision. Franczak highlighted the Venezuelan president's support and influence, unique in the regional context, on Carter and reported that: "Pérez preferred to employ the United Nations to support developing countries, since there they had the greatest chance of gaining both solidarity and credibility."³⁵⁰ The relation between the two was strong, they saw each other regularly, and Carter called him the "counselor" on North-South and Latin American issues.³⁵¹ There was a rapport of mutual respect, Pérez saw Carter as "a voice [rising] from a great nation to tell the world that human values are

³⁴⁷ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 256. See also: CIA.gov

³⁴⁸ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 131.

³⁴⁹ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 256.

³⁵⁰ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 136.

³⁵¹ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 137.

paramount.”³⁵² During their first official meeting, Carter and Pérez had almost complete agreement on issues such as human rights, terrorism, Caribbean development, and the situation in Cuba.

Despite cooperation related to human rights, there were underlying tensions in the economic sector, especially on the issue of foreign debt. Pérez has been critical of the United States focus on poverty reduction, arguing that it has been done in isolation and without considering the need for structural changes. Pérez-Guerrero, former UNCTAD secretary-general and CIEC cochair, explained: “We have the impression that even the United States at times was more inclined to defend the status quo than create new solutions.” And Pérez added: “Concern over the poor is understood, but poverty is a symptom not a cause.”³⁵³ The CIEC was unable to achieve significant results. The Carter administration, while securing support and financial resources, decisively rejected any form of debt relief: “We see no prospect of action in CIEC or elsewhere on generalized debt relief.”³⁵⁴ Indeed, the administration agreed to a Common Fund but left the content and capitalization ambiguous; supported a special action program for the Fourth World worth one billion of dollars; and pledged to increase development assistance multilateral bodies, with Vance’s promise of a doubling. All subjects to congressional approval. However, agreements on energy and debt, major issues for Third World.³⁵⁵

Clearly, despite the efforts of Carter and his administration, the results were ambiguous and less than tangible. In a 1978 document assessing the impact of Carter’s human rights policy in Latin America, the CIA found “encouraging signs of progress,” especially in Chile, but also recognized wide disparities. According to Sargent, the extent of human rights violations decreased between 1977 and 1981. However, it was difficult to determine how much of this improvement was due to United States influence.³⁵⁶

This thesis was supported by the presence of ambiguities between idealism and pragmatism. The case of the “friendly dictatorship” in Panama, according to Sargent, was

³⁵² M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 137.

³⁵³ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 139. See also: U.S. Department of State, “*South America; Latin America Region*”, 2018, declassified, U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, vol. III, p. 1001. [History.State.gov](https://history.state.gov)

³⁵⁴ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 138.

³⁵⁵ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 137.

³⁵⁶ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 257.

emblematic in this context. Carter negotiated with Omar Torrijos, the Panamanian military leader, two agreements that returned control of the Canal Zone to Panama. Torrijos was, by Carter's own admission, a "military dictator;" however, Carter did not use the Canal treaties as an opportunity to promote human rights. The return of the Canal represented an achievement, but the event, according to Carter, indicates that diplomatic engagement and human rights protection were not equivalent goals; the former required cooperation with the current governments, while the latter opposed them.³⁵⁷ Franczak adds that Carter's choice to hold the treaty signing ceremony at OAS headquarters and to invite all Latin American heads of state, including dictators Augusto Pinochet and Anastasio Somoza was a strategic choice. Carter himself affirmed: "The point of the ceremony was for the American people to see that the treaties enjoyed complete support by all the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean."³⁵⁸ Despite this, Latin American resistance proved particularly fierce in defending sovereignty. Sargent argues that while some Caribbean and Central American nations sided with Washington, the Southern Cone opposed, standing behind the banner of sovereignty and turning the OAS meeting in Grenada into "a battleground for U.S. human rights policy."³⁵⁹

In conclusion, for Carter, Latin America represented both a test for principles and a stage for geopolitical interventions, where the human rights narrative appeared at apparent odds with the protection of United States national interests. Sargent, presenting a balanced viewpoint, acknowledges a strong commitment to human rights in the Carter administration, although he points out the difficulties in applying them universally. Similarly, Franczak sees Carter as guided by noble values, but he failed to structurally reform the relation between United States and Latin America.³⁶⁰ In addition, Pastor recognizes the concrete consequences of Carter's strategy in Latin America, stating that authoritarian governments eventually moderated their oppressive actions. Haitian president Jean-Claude Duvalier, to take one example, released political prisoners and improved the atrocious conditions in his jails shortly after the election of Carter. However

³⁵⁷ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 255.

³⁵⁸ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 129. See also: J. Carter, "Statement on the Panama Canal Treaty Signing", 7 September 1977. [MillerCenter.org](https://www.millercenter.org)

³⁵⁹ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 256.

³⁶⁰ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p.131.

he re-arrested opponents in late November 1980 after Carter's defeat.³⁶¹ Therefore, while Carter was committed to restoring the reputation of the United States worldwide with a morally renewed approach, Latin America became the main test ground, where "by the end of 1978, the administration had implemented most of the initiatives launched in the previous year."³⁶² The cause of this relative success lies in the meeting of interests, the favorable regional conditions and a political legitimacy that could not be achieved in other parts of the world.

3. Obstacles of Carter's Policy and End of the NIEO

As pointed out in the previous chapter, disagreements within the administration also concerned foreign policy on human rights. Indeed, not all the people who supported Carter during the campaign gave to human rights and basic needs the importance that the president reserved for them. According to Brzezinski, along with other members of the Trilateral Commission, the main goals consisted of economic coordination, cooperation and energy preservation.³⁶³ Brzezinski said that in the choice between American power or human rights he felt more attracted to the first option.³⁶⁴ According to one scholar, Brzezinski, aware of the issue between the Global North and the Global South, stated that achieving greater social justice, particularly between rich and poor nations, would require a loss on the part of rich countries. More specifically, these costs would involve the transfer of resources, such as financial aid, technology, information or even trade advantages, from developed countries in the North to less developed countries in the South. Even Vance, who was more committed to humanitarian assistance, declared that foreign assistance was the key element the United States could offer to improve its relations with developing countries.³⁶⁵ However Carter saw human rights policy not only as ending the "Nixon-Kissinger-Ford" strategy of supporting anti-communist

³⁶¹ R. A. Pastor, *Exiting the Whirlpool*, p. 46.

³⁶² R. A. Pastor, *Exiting the Whirlpool*, p. 40.

³⁶³ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p.133.

³⁶⁴ Z. Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, P. 49.

³⁶⁵ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 250.

governments, but also as an opportunity to incentivize America's non-democratic partners toward openness and reform.³⁶⁶

As mentioned previously, the PRM-28 analysis showed that the Carter administration emphasized equal opportunity for individuals by focusing on basic human needs rather than equal opportunity for states through G77-supported comprehensive structural reform.³⁶⁷ Not only did the Third World not accept this concept but also the National Security Council. Roger Hansen, NSC Official and ODC reports Contributor, said that this political view was a:

“Attempt to interfere with developing country sovereignty, to limit the process of Southern industrialization by stressing such goals as rural development, basic education and preventive medicine and to dismiss further consideration of the need for the broader structural reforms desired by the South.”³⁶⁸

As Franczak demonstrated by analyzing the report of the NSC North-South Group, the administration was aware of the ambiguity and conceptual inconsistency of human rights policy. The group repeatedly emphasized the need for a comprehensive and balanced response, covering not only poverty reduction assistance (basic needs and appropriate technologies), but also structural reforms, including major changes in trade.³⁶⁹

However, Sargent argues, the lack of interest in Congress in increasing the international aid budget proved disastrous.³⁷⁰ If Congress opposed Third World demands related to redistribution, the State Department, at UNCTAD V in Manila and the 1979 UNCSTD, emphasized that the only issue on the table for the South was receiving new money from existing institutions, such as United States Agency for International Development and the World Bank, specifically earmarked for poverty alleviation and transfer of appropriate technology.³⁷¹ The administration's North-South economic initiatives were weak. Franczak acknowledges a false promise by Carter and argues that: “There was a flip side to the Carter team's mock-superhero pledge to ‘make the world safe for interdependence,’

³⁶⁶ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p.133.

³⁶⁷ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p.115.

³⁶⁸ R. D. Hansen, “North-South Policy: What's the Problem?”, *Foreign Affairs*, 1980, vol. 58, n. 5, p. 1111.

³⁶⁹ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 148.

³⁷⁰ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 250.

³⁷¹ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 148.

and it involved changing the terms of the North-South dialogue itself.”³⁷² The State Department’s strategy in February was to modify the dialogue according to United States objectives, changing the focus from restructuring the international economic system to a practical search for ways to improve its effectiveness. A State Department representative engaged in the talks summarized the American position:

“The specifics varied from issue to issue, but the policy remained the same: no funds, no institutions, no expansion of UNCTAD, no change in the present system, no impairment of U.S. autonomy, no increased international management, no invasion of the private sector.”³⁷³

Regarding commodities, which made up more than eighty percent of developing nations’ exports, the United States rejected G77 proposals for their marketing and distribution. Nonetheless, following Vance’s commitment, the State Department sought to conclude Common Fund negotiations. On debt, the Congress rejected G77 proposals regarding the creation of a separate commission.³⁷⁴ The Third World, for its part, never accepted the restrictive proposals of the United States. Indeed, unlike Carter’s emphasis on the individual and his fundamental rights, according to one scholar, CERDS and NIEO were: “a competitor vision of universal justice” in which “the central object was an augmentation of the southern state, deploying the internationalist language of rights and solidarity to enhance the status not of the citizen but of the sovereign.”³⁷⁵ The failure to reach agreement on the Common Fund to stabilize commodity prices is one of the most significant closures reported by historians. Despite opening initiatives related to the Bonn summit,³⁷⁶ Carter never spoke to Congress in favor of it. Moreover, after the negotiations were concluded in July 1980, he chose not to present them to the Senate, fearing that this might adversely affect his reelection.³⁷⁷

³⁷² M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 170.

³⁷³ R. K. Olson, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the New International Economic Order: Negotiating Global Problems, 1974-1981*, London, Routledge, 2019, p. 47.

³⁷⁴ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 155.

³⁷⁵ R. Burke, “Competing for the Last Utopia? The NIEO, Human Rights, and the World Conference for the International Women’s Year, Mexico City, June 1975”, *Humanity Journal*, vol. 6, n. 1, 2015, p. 50.

³⁷⁶ Fourth G7 summit was to coordinate policies on economic growth, energy, trade and aid to developing countries. Among the issues discussed was the promotion of the Common Fund for Commodities. G7G20.documents.org

³⁷⁷ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 151.

Mexican President Echeverría at the 1975 World Conference for the International Women's Year pointed out to United States delegates what he considered as the real source of the problem, which was not the failure of governments to respect individual rights, but the failure of the international system to respect the economic rights of states.³⁷⁸ The attention to basic human needs and the reduction of global inequality proved to be an unavoidable strategic goal for Carter, not merely a moral issue. In addition to the weakness of economic aid and the absence of congressional support, it became impossible to change the global economic order. In the Carter administration's justification, its explicit denial of further structural reforms through UNCTAD was more sincere than Kissinger's announcement about numerous initiatives lacking the political capital, time or interest to support them.³⁷⁹

Indeed, despite the President's idealistic ambitions, Hercus pointed out that an additional obstacle to Carter's policy and NIEO goals was resistance within International Financial Institutions such as the World Bank and IMF, whose vision was based on market liberalization, state withdrawal, privatization and austerity policies.³⁸⁰ Carter's apparently moral approach in emphasizing the importance of civil rights and excluding economic rights suited the interests of transnational capital and fit, according to Hercus, into the emerging context of neoliberalism.³⁸¹ Historical evidence indicates that Carter was the first president to bring human rights to the attention of the Bretton Woods institutions.

The year 1977 marked the beginning of an era when the President attempted to exert influence on World Bank financing in relation to human rights. In that year, Carter wrote a letter to Clarence Long, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations of the House Appropriations Committee, stating that he intended to order the United States Executive Director at the Bank to oppose loans to seven countries specifically cited for violating the rights of their citizens (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Uganda, Mozambique, Angola and Cuba). He also added an economic justification to the request, considering that this would prevent these countries from accessing loans needed to produce commodities, such as sugar, palm oil or citrus fruits, which could damage producers in

³⁷⁸ R. Burke, "Competing for the Last Utopia?", p. 53.

³⁷⁹ M. Franczak, *Global Inequality*, p. 157.

³⁸⁰ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 160.

³⁸¹ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 160.

the United States.³⁸² This helped to further solidify the belief that Carter's human rights policy was selectively used to sustain United States economic power in the world.

Moreover, Hercus points out that, up to that point, the World Bank had not established connections with human rights. The document of 29 November 1977, titled "Human Rights Issues and the Bank and IDA," states that when the Bank's Agreement Articles were drafted the question of human rights was not considered.³⁸³ Following a quick review of human rights issues by the World Bank, and given its decision to refrain from discussion of human rights, it acknowledged the Third World's view regarding economic rights, but adopted the United States orientation regarding human rights.³⁸⁴ In fact, World Bank President Robert McNamara refused to change the Bank's procedures because of human rights concerns, arguing that lending must be based on purely economic considerations.³⁸⁵ At the same time, the Bank rejected Carter's attempt to link its activities to political issues, as the Bretton Woods institutions must maintain a neutral orientation to politics. Indeed, their main objective is to promote economic growth and global development through a liberal and open economic system.³⁸⁶ Hercus, however, argues that in the World Bank's structural adjustment programs (loan conditions that mandated the privatization of government industries, deregulation, and trade and current account liberalization) lies the neoliberal ideology, which ultimately undermined Third World governments through strict loan conditionality and further exposed the citizens of the periphery to the exigencies of world capitalist forces.³⁸⁷

Hercus intends to emphasize the link between the call for a New International Economic Order and the emergence of neoliberal policies. This is because the height of Third World solidarity in the 1970s occurred during the global recession and the decline of American power. Jimmy Carter's presidency led to a division of consensus regarding welfare and the introduction of the first phase of deregulation. At the same time, G77, through the NIEO proposal, demanded government intervention in both domestic and international markets and reform of the international system. Neoliberal policy fully supported market

³⁸² C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 161.

³⁸³ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 160.

³⁸⁴ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 162.

³⁸⁵ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 161.

³⁸⁶ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 163.

³⁸⁷ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 163.

freedom in the distribution of resources.³⁸⁸ In addition, following the collapse of the Bretton Woods System, the global economy received massive amounts of money. Petrodollars, international markets and United States deficit encouraged speculation in foreign investment and currency exchange. These money flows became so strong that they affected government reserves and had a significant impact on a state's economic stability. In this new scenario, the capitalist class was able to pursue its neoliberal plan: reduction of government spending, deregulation, privatization and opening to the market; this resulted in a diminishing role of the state and a reassertion of the dominance of global capital.³⁸⁹

The global neoliberal system that was emerging and took shape in the 1980s, partly due to the election of Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, promoted an increasingly connected world economy and a clear division between the state political sector and the market. The neoliberal perspective was clearly opposed to the NIEO plan, which called for state intervention in national and international economies.³⁹⁰ Under Reagan's presidency, the Bretton Woods institutions gained significant power by implementing the previously mentioned neoliberal policies through structural adjustment programs in developing countries. Regarding the NIEO, Reagan firmly obstructed the initiative for a new economic order and rejected offers of confrontation between the North and the South in the United Nations institutions. Hercus asserts that the neoliberal principles promoted by Reagan reduced demands from the Third World; however, she attributes the beginning of the decline of NIEO and the emergence of neoliberalism to Carter's proposed definition of human rights. While Reagan derided Jimmy Carter's human rights policy, he adopted the criteria set by Carter, which attached less importance to economic and social rights.³⁹¹

In December 1979, the United Nations General Assembly issued a resolution for a series of comprehensive negotiations relating to international economic cooperation for development to be held in subsequent years. The resolution noted that: "Despite the great efforts made by many countries, especially the developing countries, at a large number of

³⁸⁸ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 170.

³⁸⁹ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 171.

³⁹⁰ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 167.

³⁹¹ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 164.

meetings and international conferences aimed at the establishment of the new international economic order, only limited progress has been achieved.” And arranges new negotiations “In the field of raw materials, energy, trade, development, money and finance.” And it also specifies that such negotiations should “Take place within the United Nations system.”³⁹² These talks were designed to support the NIEO in the 1980s; however, the proposed global negotiations stalled under Reagan’s refusal to work within the United Nation system, his defense of the Bretton Woods institutions, and his attack on the development paradigm.³⁹³ Held in Cancun on 22 and 23 October 1981, the North-South Summit marked the first round of global negotiations under General Assembly Resolution 34/138. A Memorandum of Conversation dated 24 October 1981, evinces Raegan’s rejection of multilateral institutions by stating that: “Setting up new institutions and organizations might be counterproductive.”³⁹⁴

Among the typical neoliberal policies implemented by Carter during his term, Hercus highlights the deregulation of oil, gas, railroads, trucking, and airlines, as well as cuts to social welfare provisions and the implementation of monetary austerity in 1979. With the advent of Raegan these policies were further implemented and expanded, but he criticized welfare programs and introduced a low-wage, low-tax economic model.³⁹⁵ Thus, the post-war Keynesian model that advocated state interventionism in economic matters was fading away in favor of a neoliberal model that argued that human well-being, as measured by the individual’s ability to freely pursue his own interests, is best realized by the undistorted functioning of the market.³⁹⁶

Thus, the connection between a very nuanced view of human rights and the emergence of neoliberalism is evident. Hercus states that also significant nongovernmental organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, by advocating the distinction between politics and economics and focusing on the individual, have

³⁹² United Nations General Assembly, “Global negotiations relating to international economic co-operation for development”, Resolution 34/138, 1979. [UN.org](https://www.un.org/)

³⁹³ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 165.

³⁹⁴ U.S. Department of State, “International Economic Development; International Debt; Foreign Assistance”, 2024, declassified, FRUS, vol. XXXVIII, p. 203. [History.State.gov](https://www.history.state.gov/)

³⁹⁵ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 164.

³⁹⁶ A. Kirkup and T. Evans, “The Myth of Western Opposition to Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights? A Reply to Whelan and Donnelly”, *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 31, n. 1, 2009, p. 235.

helped counter the NIEO's promotion of a state's collective right to development.³⁹⁷ It is concluded that this collective right, supported also by the 1977 General Assembly Resolution 32/130, has been undermined by the consideration of human rights as exclusively civil and political, proposed by the Carter administration.³⁹⁸

The beginning of a "shift to the right" in Carter's foreign policy to oppose the Soviet Union was also recorded by Basosi. According to Basosi, as early as 1977, the administration was showing concern about Cuban activism in Angola and Ethiopia, as the Cuban armed forces were seen as "proxies" of Moscow.³⁹⁹ In August 1977, Robert Pastor sent a memorandum to Brzezinski suggesting that the withdrawal of Cuban troops should be encouraged through indirect pressure from the Third World, particularly through the Non-Aligned Countries Movement.⁴⁰⁰ Carter's strategy, strongly supported by Brzezinski, aimed to persuade member nations that "the credibility of the NAM [was] seriously threatened by Cuba's actions as the Soviets' military surrogate. [. . .]. Silence on Cuba's actions implie[d] support."⁴⁰¹ However, this strategy proved ineffective, as in 1979 Cuba would host the NAM Summit, using this event to justify and reinforce its actions. The administration's stance turned out to be progressively stricter toward Cuba, further aggravating relations with the Soviet Union.⁴⁰²

This link of continuity between Carter and Reagan has also been emphasized by Sargent, but unlike what Hercus intends to show, he argues that the reasons were military and economic, rather than strategic. Indeed, the geopolitical context that emerged in the late 1970s, characterized by the second oil shock, the Iranian revolution, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, forced Carter to abandon his post-Cold War strategy, pushing him toward renewed rearmament and Cold War logic.⁴⁰³ The strengthening of military relations in the Middle East was in stark opposition to the administration's previous

³⁹⁷ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 172.

³⁹⁸ C. Hercus, *The Struggle Over Human Rights*, p. 173.

³⁹⁹ D. Basosi, "Something that apparently troubles the Cubans significantly: Jimmy Carter's attempt to pressure Cuba 'out of Africa' through the Non-Aligned Movement, 1977-78", *Cold War History*, vol. 24, n. 3, 2023, p. 359.

⁴⁰⁰ D. Basosi, "Something that apparently troubles the Cubans significantly", p. 365.

⁴⁰¹ D. Basosi, "Something that apparently troubles the Cubans significantly", p. 368.

⁴⁰² D. Basosi, "Something that apparently troubles the Cubans significantly", p. 377.

⁴⁰³ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 286.

efforts to prioritize the promotion of human rights and the management of interdependence relations. The Carter administration elevated the Middle East as a strategic priority because policymakers recognized the West's unalterable and inextricable dependence on the region's oil. Carter's pursuit of a prudent energy policy continued, but the security framework that the administration devised during 1979 indicated that making the world safe for interdependence might mandate military methods, not just architectures of cooperation.⁴⁰⁴ After the invasion of Afghanistan, Carter asked the Senate to suspend consideration of the SALT II Treaty and announced a package of retaliatory measures, in 1980 the President also issued the Carter Doctrine, enabling United States troops to repulse foreign assaults.⁴⁰⁵

Carter's return to Cold War rhetoric, his reactions after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and his administration's creation of a security plan for the Middle East caused divisions within the West. Used to the stability and trade opportunities produced by détente, Western European leaders, with the exception of Margaret Thatcher, viewed the resurrection of Cold War logic in Washington with suspicion.⁴⁰⁶ Yet, at the G7 summit held in 1980 in Venice the West recognized that the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was "unacceptable" and declared its support for Afghanistan's courageous resistance. During the same meeting, the economy and inflation were also discussed. Carter supported Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker's anti-inflationary policy of high interest rates and stated that: "Determined fiscal and monetary restraint is required to break inflationary expectations."⁴⁰⁷ The Volcker Shock of 1979, as Sargent and many others argue, anticipated the pursuit of price stability at the expense of other goals in the early 1980s.⁴⁰⁸ The approval by the other leaders present led to the emergence of a new international agreement and the slow decline of Keynesianism at the multilateral level.

⁴⁰⁴ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 288.

⁴⁰⁵ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 289.

⁴⁰⁶ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 289.

⁴⁰⁷ J. Carter, "Venice Economic Summit Conference Declaration Issued at the Conclusion of the Conference", 22 June 1980. TheAmericanPresidencyProject.ucsb.edu

⁴⁰⁸ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 292.

This showed, according to Sargent, the change in direction that the G7 followed in the difficult context of the second oil crisis.⁴⁰⁹

Professor Aaron Donaghy came to the same conclusions, explaining the “turn to the Right” in the president's policies as a reaction to the political and economic conditions of 1979, as well as a desire to appear determined in preparation for reelection. Donaghy repeatedly stresses that Carter’s 1979 policies must be analyzed “through the prism of the election.”⁴¹⁰ Choices that moved Carter away from the principles he had advocated at the beginning of his term and closer to his successor, such as the MX program,⁴¹¹ are viewed by the author not as a deep conviction on Carter's part, but rather as “political pragmatism” aimed at gaining the support of conservatives in Congress.⁴¹² According to the author, there was influence in these more stringent decisions from Brzezinski who, in addition to favoring a more assertive defensive strategy toward the Soviet Union, was also aware of the perceived “national weakness” that Carter’s political competitors were exploiting. Donaghy, although he supports geopolitical justifications for Carter’s turn like Sargent, indicates that the main reason for his decisions lay in a desire to increase consensus, strengthen his domestic image, and respond to criticism regarding alleged United States weakness in the face of a Soviet Union seen as aggressive. In 1980 it all resulted in the abandonment of the “middle ground” that distinguished Carter positively and negatively from the beginning of his tenure.⁴¹³

In addition to the political reassessment in the economic sphere that led to strategies compatible with his successor, Sargent claims that the similarities between Carter and Reagan would also be evident in military policy. In the East-West context, Carter, during the winter of 1979-80, urged Congress to increase defense funding and devised a five-year program to upgrade nuclear forces. The Carter administration also devised military strategies that anticipated his successor’s new Cold War posture. In July 1980, Carter

⁴⁰⁹ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 290.

⁴¹⁰ A. Donaghy, *The Second Cold War: Carter, Reagan, and the Politics of Foreign Policy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021, p. 59.

⁴¹¹ Carter approved the MX (Missile Experimental) program in 1979, despite his pacifist policies, to generate support for the SALT II treaty and to demonstrate toughness against the USSR. The extremely powerful and expensive missile generated heated environmental, political, and budgetary disagreements.

⁴¹² A. Donaghy, *The Second Cold War*, p. 65.

⁴¹³ A. Donaghy, *The Second Cold War*, p. 65.

signed document PD-59,⁴¹⁴ which called for the creation of detailed strategies for managing and achieving victory in a nuclear conflict of limited scope.⁴¹⁵ It could be argued that the initial aspirations of Carter and Brezhnev to discuss major reductions in nuclear arsenals and halt a thirty-year arms competition now seemed unachievable.

To conclude, the selection of works by Franczak, Sargent and Hercus allows us to understand more deeply the multiple aspects of the Carter administration's response to the New International Economic Order. Among the many scholars who have addressed the theme "Carter and the NIEO," the selection of these three specific stems from the desire to bring together conflicting but complementary opinions. Each of them contributed to the understanding of the interaction between ideology, economy and strategy in US foreign policy in the 1970s and 1980s. Michael Franczak, analyzing the relationship between foreign policy and international inequality, has shown how the apparent willingness of the administration to engage in North-South dialogue has often helped to promote the existing economic order. Daniel Sargent, on the other hand, identifies the dynamic and contradictory choices of the Carter administration within a structural crisis of US foreign policy, further aggravated by the geopolitical difficulties of the 1970s. Finally, Courtney Hercus, analyzing in detail official government documents, memoranda of talks, and United Nations resolutions, focused her work on the role of human rights and basic human needs, demonstrating a continuity in Carter and Regan's response to NIEO, and how even a seemingly progressive policy had strategic goals. In the recurrent struggle between democratic values and national interests, Hercus has shown that it was not a change of government guilty of the inability to realize the NIEO, but a deeper and more rooted configuration of the world order, which, as at the time "Nixon-Kissinger-Ford" was characterized by an asymmetric imbalance towards the global North.

⁴¹⁴ The Presidential Directive 59 rewrites the nuclear strategy of the United States towards a flexible response capacity and a prolonged nuclear conflict, placing the emphasis no longer on deterrence but on controlling escalation. JimmyCarterLibraryPD-59.gov

⁴¹⁵ D. J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*, p. 292.

Conclusion

This research examined the Jimmy Carter administration's complex strategy regarding the New International Economic Order. It found that his policy reaction, which appeared to be based on human rights and basic needs, proved uncertain and oscillated between innovative language and constant strategic pragmatism. In carrying out this analysis, it emerged how Carter's reaction both differed from and, at the same time, aligned with those of the administrations that preceded and followed him.

The first chapter presented the situation that led to the creation of the NIEO as a response to the Bretton Woods institutions, their crisis and the growing gap of inequality between the North and the South. Developing countries, faced with the dominance of the North, particularly the United States, turned to the UN institutions to denounce these inequalities and demand a more equitable and just global system. In particular, Third World countries presented several essential demands to change the world economic system, reduce economic dependence on developed nations, and promote self-reliant development. The demands included: control over natural resources and economic activities within their territory; a fairer connection between the prices of raw materials exported from developing countries and the prices of industrial goods imported from those nations; increased participation in decision-making by international financial institutions; the transfer of financial and technological resources from advanced countries; and preferential treatment for developing countries in international trade. The requests, formalized in 1974 by the United Nations General Assembly with the Declaration for the Establishment of a New International Economic Order, accompanied by the Plan of Action for its implementation and the Charter on the Economic Rights and Duties of States, posed a challenge to the existing world order, especially to the United States, which perceived a danger to its power.

The second chapter examined in detail the policy adopted by the Carter administration from 1977 to 1981 regarding the NIEO. After describing the approach of his predecessors Nixon and Ford to the NIEO, it was pointed out that, although characterized by a distinctive moral tone, Carter's policy received and, in some cases, continued political strategies aimed at preserving the current state of the global order. Both support for and opposition to Carter's foreign policy has been acknowledged, particularly that of adopting an overly human rights-focused approach while neglecting other key elements such as the

economy and national security. Despite the global recognition that earned him the Nobel Peace Prize, his policies have been judged by many critics as overly naive and inconsistent. In addition, internal political differences regarding the NIEO were highlighted. Initially, Kissinger's perspective was analyzed, which advocated the importance of a strategic opening to the Third World to ensure stable relations and preserve an economic order under United States influence. This view was compared with that of Moynihan, who strongly opposed wealth redistribution and was more defensive about Western values, American sovereignty and the market economic system. Thereafter, differences within the Carter administration itself were highlighted, which partially reduced the effectiveness of Carter's foreign policy. In particular, while Brzezinski argued that a strategic opening, focused primarily on political rather than economic aspects, was essential to preserve United States global influence, Vance was more cautious. While rejecting calls for resource redistribution or debt cancellation, he did not oppose dialogue with the South and put forward a proposal for cooperation based on concrete aid to meet real needs. In this chapter, the delicate balance between Carter's desire to effect change by moving away from his predecessors and approaching third world countries through an ethical approach, and the need to make strategic geopolitical decisions for the good of the nation is clearly perceived.

The third chapter analyzed the vagueness of Carter's policy. After an initial introduction, a shift focused on issues of geopolitics and national security was highlighted. While some scholars justify this decision by the world events of 1979 (including the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the second oil shock), which led the president to protect his country's interests, others point out that in reality the administration was opposed to the NIEO program from its inception, viewing it as a threat. The response manifested itself through a foreign policy focused on human rights but devoid of promoting economic rights; therefore, the policy adopted did not alter the existing global economic order. In fact, a hidden hierarchy of human rights present in PRM-28 has been highlighted, which privileges civil and political rights over social and economic rights. This moral selectivity proved advantageous to the strategic goal of delegitimizing rival regimes, particularly in Latin America. In addition, it has been pointed out that Carter's policies inadvertently played a role in the conclusion of the NIEO, since his decisions paved the way for Reagan's neoliberal policies, which, during the 1981 Cancun Summit, marked the final

end of the NIEO, at least in its original form. Studies indicate that the truth lies in an ambiguous area; Carter, although moved by genuine intentions and laudable ethical principles that he continued to follow even after his presidency ended, failed to achieve real change and separation from previous administrations. The interests of the country he was charged with governing prevailed, and in practice his administration fostered a more strategic approach that brought about significant change and maintained the current economic situation.

The research aimed to show the difficulties and inconsistencies of a policy that, despite claiming to be ethical, has had a limited effect on economic redistribution needs. In addition, the paper offers a detailed and in-depth analysis of the Carter administration's reaction to the NIEO, seeking to clarify the ambiguity of the policy that oscillates between a “true ethical motivation” and a “planned strategy.” Carter’s ethical approach, examined particularly through a comparison of the positions of Sargent, Franczak, and Hercus, proved not only inconsistent in its intent, but also unbalanced, favoring civil and political rights at the expense of economic and social rights. The case of Carter and the NIEO is representative when governments try to harmonize moral values with economic and geopolitical interests in an international context.

Although this thesis has analyzed the connection between Carter and the NIEO, future research could explore not only the various responses of developing countries to Carter’s actions, but also the reactions of governments of other “developed North” nations to the NIEO, with the goal of providing a comparative analysis that highlights similarities and differences from what is discussed in this paper.

In conclusion, the Carter administration’s response to the NIEO represents an emblematically controversial moment in the history of U.S. foreign policy. A moment occurred when the pursuit of meaningful moral leadership contrasted with the necessary protection of the global economic establishment, charting a course that, although it attempted a radical rhetorical and methodological shift, set the stage for the total failure of ambitious aspirations for a more just international economic order.

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