



## 'Ending our support for the dictators': Ed Koch, Uruguay, and human rights

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## 'Ending our support for the dictators': Ed Koch, Uruguay, and human rights

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### ABSTRACT

Primed by Amnesty International's reporting, inspired by interactions with a centrist exiled politician, and galvanised by a growing congressional human rights movement, in 1976 Representative Ed Koch introduced an amendment that ended military assistance to the Uruguayan government. The article demonstrates that Koch's efforts were part of a broader transnational campaign to end US support for the repressive Uruguayan government and how such a measure could be achieved despite executive branch resistance.

### KEYWORDS

Latin America; United States; human rights; transnational

Advocating for the observance of human rights can be dangerous work. Rarely, however, have US-based activists been threatened as the result of their efforts to secure protections of human rights internationally. Thus it was unusual in 1976 that Representative Ed Koch (D-NY)'s life was potentially endangered in connection with his campaign to end US military assistance to the repressive military regime in Uruguay. This article analyses the development and influence of a transnational network motivated to end US support for the government in Montevideo. Made up, principally, of a political exile and his son, a former missionary, a young academic, Koch, and his congressional allies, they secured a narrow but significant human rights victory by cutting off security assistance to Uruguay. They were inspired by greater congressional activism in foreign affairs, including on human rights; broader concern about US support for repressive regimes in the late 1960s and early 1970s; and transnational connections to those directly affected by the Uruguayan repression.

This loose group built on earlier successful alliances between human rights activists and members of Congress, and this research is informed by the important scholarship of Kathryn Sikkink, Lars Schoultz, William Michael Schmidli, Patrick William Kelly, and Vanessa Walker on the place of human rights in US-Latin American relations.<sup>1</sup> These works have shown how Americans, initially non-state actors, diplomats, members of Congress, and eventually high-level officials in the White House and State Department, made human rights part of the inter-American diplomatic agenda. They have not,

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<sup>1</sup>Kathryn Sikkink, *Mixed Signals: U.S. Human Rights Policy and Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Lars Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy toward Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); William Michael Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere: Human Rights and U.S. Cold War Policy toward Argentina* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); Patrick William Kelly, *Sovereign Emergencies: Latin America and the Making of Global Human Rights Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Vanessa Walker, "Ambivalent Allies: Advocates, Diplomats, and the Struggles for an 'American' Human Rights Policy" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2011).

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however, explored in great depth the genesis or operation of the activism that achieved the Koch Amendment, which ended US military assistance to Uruguay. Utilising official records in the United States and Uruguay, the personal papers of Koch and other key members of Congress, as well as the archives of essential nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), I reveal how transnational connections and distress at the abrogation of democracy in Uruguay garnered high-level attention to and action on human rights violations in a small country off the radar screen of many Americans.

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The station chief for the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Montevideo, Frederick Latrash, learned about a threat against Koch in July 1976 but seems to have discounted it due to the consumption of alcohol by the two offending Uruguayan officials.<sup>2</sup> The US perception of the danger changed after 21 September 1976 when Orlando Letelier, a former Chilean ambassador to the United States and a key aide to former Chilean president Salvador Allende, was killed by a car bomb in Washington, DC.<sup>3</sup> In the wake of Letelier's assassination, the threat against Koch 'caused a small, secret earthquake inside the U.S. government' as one observer put it.<sup>4</sup> According to State Department records, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) shared the news with Koch on 1 October 1976. Koch expressed concern in a letter to attorney general Edward Levi, which precipitated a request for more information from the US embassy in Montevideo regarding the 'seriousness' of the danger.<sup>5</sup> Koch asked Levi: 'Should my staff and I not have F.B.I. protection?'<sup>6</sup> CIA Director George H. W. Bush counselled Koch that in the CIA's assessment the threat 'should not be taken seriously and that the likelihood of it being carried out at this time is remote'.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the chatter by Uruguayan officials signalled the degree to which Koch's activism posed a threat to the government in Montevideo and its desire for support from Washington.

What had Koch done to warrant such a threat and render it worrisome by some US officials? The representative had introduced an amendment that called for an end to US military assistance to Uruguay on the basis of the country's poor human rights record. He also initiated a lobbying campaign to ensure its passage in both houses of Congress.

What made Koch turn his attention to a small country in Latin America? First, in the mid-1970s Uruguayan society experienced increasing violations of human rights as the democratic system often fondly referred to as the 'Switzerland' of Latin America crumbled. The government-sponsored violence in Uruguay was systematic and involved extensive

<sup>2</sup>John Dinges, *The Condor Years: How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents* (New York: The New Press, 2004), 215, 217.

<sup>3</sup>On the broader impact of Letelier's assassination, see Alan McPherson, *Ghosts of Sheridan Circle: How a Washington Assassination Brought Pinochet's Terror State to Justice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

<sup>4</sup>Dinges, *The Condor Years*, 216.

<sup>5</sup>Koch to Levi, 19 October 1976, National Security Archive, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB112/koch01.pdf> accessed 5 June 2018; and Telegram 292202, 1 December 1976, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976: Volume E-11, Part 2* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2015).

<sup>6</sup>Koch to Levi, 19 October 1976, National Security Archive, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB112/koch01.pdf> accessed 5 June 2018.

<sup>7</sup>Bush to Koch, 4 November 1976, Uruguay Correspondence, Box 22, Edward I. Koch Papers, City of New York Department of Records and Information Services, Municipal Archives, New York, NY (hereafter Koch Papers). Although embassy officials in Uruguay disregarded the threat, given that it was uttered 'after a couple of drinks', they nonetheless opposed allowing the two military officials to be later stationed in Washington as the Uruguayan government hoped. Telegram 4652, 2 December 1976, *FRUS, 1969–1976: Vol E-11, Part 2*; and Shlaudeman to Habib, 13 December 1976, National Security Archive, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB112/koch03.pdf> accessed 5 June 2018.

surveillance, arrests, and torture.<sup>8</sup> Human rights violations there were widespread in terms of the political process, freedom of the press, academic freedom, and extensive surveillance.<sup>9</sup> According to US Ambassador to Uruguay Ernest Siracusa, because Uruguay was such a small country ‘hardly anyone was spared’ from emotional connections to those arrested.<sup>10</sup> Amnesty International, an international nongovernmental organisation that had been established in 1961, asserted that one out of every 450 Uruguayans was a political detainee and that one out of every 50 Uruguayans had faced interrogation.<sup>11</sup>

One reason that human rights violations in Uruguay garnered attention was due to activism by NGOs such as Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ). Amnesty International focused its research on specific Uruguayans and classes of individuals facing repression. For example, it reported on human rights violations facing doctors in Uruguay as early as June 1973 and considered sending a fact-finding mission to the country.<sup>12</sup> It also catalogued broader abuses, including the lack of due process in Uruguay.<sup>13</sup> The group declared publicly at the end of June 1973 that torture was ‘a common method of interrogation’ for detainees in Uruguay.<sup>14</sup> Amnesty worked to secure the release of particular prisoners, such as the editor and journalists at the left-wing newspaper *Marcha*, and it also sought to draw attention at the United Nations to Uruguay’s human rights violations.<sup>15</sup>

Amnesty relied upon the ‘politics of empathy’ to attract members and broader attention for its work.<sup>16</sup> In the case of Uruguay, it published a brochure that highlighted the 22 people known to have been tortured to death in Uruguay. Each person’s biography, treatment in detention, wounds, and often a photograph were included.<sup>17</sup> In political scientist Lars Schoultz’s view, ‘[i]t is difficult to overestimate the influence of the [Amnesty International] reports on U.S. human rights policy during the 1970s.’<sup>18</sup> Amnesty’s members also engaged in its traditional form of activism – letter-writing campaigns by adoption groups – but faced with fast-moving events in Uruguay, Chile, and elsewhere, Amnesty International developed a new way to approach reports of human rights violations that required a rapid response. Termed its Urgent Action Campaign, the effort mobilised resources to respond to cases where torture or death might be imminent following an arrest.<sup>19</sup>

Fact-finding missions offer important evidence of human rights violations in a particular country, and Amnesty International and the ICJ undertook a joint mission to Uruguay in April and May 1974. In Uruguay the investigators found evidence of

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<sup>8</sup>Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 98.

<sup>9</sup>Popkin to Nelson, 29 August 1975, Uruguay Correspondence, Box 22, Koch Papers.

<sup>10</sup>Ernest V. Siracusa Oral History Interview, June 1989, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

<sup>11</sup>Amnesty International Campaign for the Abolition of Torture in Uruguay, Carpeta 2, Caja 21, Archivo Histórico – Diplomático, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Montevideo, Uruguay (hereafter Archivo Histórico – Diplomático).

<sup>12</sup>Report on Special Actions, June 1973 (3), Folder 69, International Executive Committee, Amnesty International International Secretariat Archives, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (hereafter AI IS).

<sup>13</sup>Press Release, 28 July 1975, Folder 948, AI IS.

<sup>14</sup>Press Release, 25 June 1973, Folder 445, AI IS.

<sup>15</sup>Press Release, 20 February 1974, Folder 948, AI IS; and Augustus to Morse, 24 May 1974, Caja 3, Adolfo Folle Martínez Cajas, Archivo Administrativo, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Montevideo, Uruguay (hereafter Archivo Administrativo).

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>17</sup>Tortured to Death in Uruguay, Carpeta 2, Caja 21, Archivo Histórico – Diplomático.

<sup>18</sup>Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy toward Latin America*, 84.

<sup>19</sup>CAT Department to CAT National Sections Coordinators, 1 October 1974, Folder 87, International Executive Committee, AI IS. For a fuller discussion of Amnesty International’s attention to Uruguay, see Debbie Sharnak, *Of Light and Struggle in Uruguay: The Contested International History of Human Rights* (draft book manuscript).

systematic torture and broad absence of due process. Their report detailed different methods of torture used and estimated that half of Uruguayan detainees experienced such treatment.<sup>20</sup> As part of that mission, Niall MacDermot, the head of the ICJ, visited the notorious Libertad prison, but he was not allowed to speak with any prisoners there.<sup>21</sup>

At the end of the year, the International Commission of Jurists felt compelled to offer a supplemental report, highlighting a recent surge in arrests as well as poor conditions for detainees in the country. The report noted that elections had still not been held and that in order to maintain their employment, professors and others were required to pledge that they had never belonged to an 'anti-national' government.<sup>22</sup> In early January, the ICJ again warned of assassinations, arrests, and purges in what the organisation characterised as an 'intensification of repression'.<sup>23</sup>

In a further innovation, on 24 February 1976, Amnesty International announced a month-long, international campaign against torture and repression in Uruguay.<sup>24</sup> The objectives were both to raise international attention to the situation in Uruguay, about which Amnesty officials believed not enough was sufficiently known, and to pressure the government in Montevideo to improve its practices.<sup>25</sup> Edy Kaufman, the head of Amnesty International's Latin American Research Department, was the coordinator for this campaign.<sup>26</sup> Amnesty sought signatures for a petition: 'We, the undersigned, call upon the Government of Uruguay to allow an independent international body to investigate allegations of torture.'<sup>27</sup> Amnesty International USA members published articles and op-eds intended to draw attention to the repression in Uruguay. One charged: 'Used to punish and intimidate rather than to obtain information, torture is directed against both the right and the left, against anyone who expresses views in opposition to the regime.'<sup>28</sup> For Amnesty, which had long focused on groups adopting political prisoners and writing letters aimed at alleviating their individual conditions, its Uruguay campaign marked a significant shift in tactics.<sup>29</sup>

As part of its Uruguay campaign Amnesty International USA held a press conference, calling for the government in Montevideo to welcome 'an independent international body to investigate allegations of torture'.<sup>30</sup> The writer Rose Styron and Uruguayan exile Wilson Ferreira Aldunate both participated and articulated this objective.<sup>31</sup> Styron's presence and

<sup>20</sup>Press Release, 16 June 1974, Folder 948, AI IS; and Report of Mission to Uruguay, April/May 1974, Folder 82, International Executive Committee, AI IS.

<sup>21</sup>Fahlander to All Members, 12 June 1974, Folder 82, International Executive Committee, AI IS.

<sup>22</sup>Supplement to Report on Uruguay of 17 June 1974, Folder 38, Box 114, Gaylord Nelson Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI (hereafter Nelson Papers); Human Rights in Uruguay and Paraguay Hearings; Further Repression in Uruguay in 12 February 1975, 1976, Carpeta 4, Caja 21, Archivo Histórico – Diplomático.

<sup>23</sup>Press Release, 24 January 1975, Carpeta 2, Caja 21, Archivo Histórico – Diplomático.

<sup>24</sup>Kathryn Sikkink has argued that until Amnesty's 1976 campaign, the human rights violations in Uruguay had not received sufficient attention. Kathryn Sikkink, 'The Emergence, Evolution, and Effectiveness of the Latin American Human Rights Network,' in *Constructing Democracy: Human Rights, Citizenship, and Society in Latin America*, ed. Elizabeth Jelin and Eric Hershberg (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 60.

<sup>25</sup>Amnesty assessed Uruguay as an appropriate target, given its 'weak economy' and 'shaky political and power structure'. International Campaign on Torture in Uruguay, Folder 450, AI IS.

<sup>26</sup>Kaufman, an Argentine-Israeli academic, had joined Amnesty while on sabbatical from Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Edy Kaufman, *Uruguay in Transition: From Civilian to Military Rule* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1979), xiii.

<sup>27</sup>Amnesty International Campaign for the Abolition of Torture, Carpeta 2, Caja 21, Archivo Histórico – Diplomático.

<sup>28</sup>Jeri Laber, 'Torture and Death in Uruguay,' *New York Times*, 10 March 1976.

<sup>29</sup>Latin American Research Department to National Sections, 2 December 1975, Folder 453, AI IS.

<sup>30</sup>David Hawk Statement, 19 February 1976, Carpeta 2, Caja 21, Archivo Histórico – Diplomático.

<sup>31</sup>Amnesty International USA included Ferreira in press conferences in connection with the campaign. Vania Markarian, *Left in Transformation: Uruguayan Exiles and the Latin American Human Rights Networks, 1967–1984* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 83, 88. A Chilean political prisoner described the United States, as opposed to Europe, as 'the place where you could really have, however minimal, some semblance of an impact'. Kelly, *Sovereign Emergencies*, 191.

discussion of Uruguayans who died under torture inevitably enhanced attention as did her published writings on the subject.<sup>32</sup> Former attorney general Ramsey Clark also spoke at the event, voicing Amnesty's assessment that Uruguay had the highest per capita concentration of political prisoners in the world; he cited nearly 6000 political prisoners in early 1976.<sup>33</sup>

During the press conference, Ferreira argued that the government's repression was unnecessary as the threat from the leftist Tupamaros had been contained by 1972. He lauded Amnesty's campaign as 'indispensable'.<sup>34</sup> Ferreira, the leader of the Blanco Party, was one of the country's most prominent politicians before he fled into exile. Americans inside and outside of government were moved by their interactions with him to highlight the abrogation of democracy and related repression in Uruguay. The transnational connections Wilson and his son Juan Raúl forged in the United States served as a foundation for subsequent activism.<sup>35</sup>

Amnesty also sought the involvement of parliamentarians, religious organisations, professional associations, and Uruguayan exiles in its campaign. One goal was to ensure that as the result of each instance of pressure, a report would be communicated back to authorities in Montevideo. That could help achieve Amnesty's larger objective, which was 'the total abolition of torture in Uruguay'.<sup>36</sup>

Amnesty's campaign culminated with the organisation giving Uruguay's President Alberto Demicheli a petition signed by 350,000 people asking that an independent investigative body be allowed to visit. The signatories hailed from 70 countries and included prominent human rights activists and parliamentarians.<sup>37</sup> Amnesty officials also handed the Uruguayan representative to the United Nations, Carlos Giambruno, a box filled with petitions.<sup>38</sup> In some respects, Amnesty's assessment of potential weaknesses in Montevideo was accurate, which can be seen in the care the embassy in Washington took to track the meetings and statements of exiles such as Wilson and Juan Raúl Ferreira as well as the progress of Amnesty's campaign.<sup>39</sup> Even more revealing is that CIA analysis identified Wilson Ferreira and Amnesty International leaders as possible targets for assassination by Operation Condor, the collaborative intelligence effort among Southern Cone security services.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, evidence from Ministry of Foreign Affairs records in Uruguay shows that at the time of Amnesty's campaign, the Uruguayan government seemed to

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<sup>32</sup>Rose Styron Statement, 19 February 1976, Carpeta 2, Caja 21, Archivo Histórico – Diplomático; and Rose Styron, "Uruguay: The Oriental Republic," *The Nation*, 14 August 1976, 107–11.

<sup>33</sup>Ramsey Clark Statement, 19 February 1976, Carpeta 2, Caja 21, Archivo Histórico – Diplomático; and George Goodman, Jr. "Uruguay Charged with Repression," *New York Times*, 20 February 1976, 59. Working for the Justice Department in the South in 1962 and 1963 had shaped Clark's commitment to protecting human rights. Katherine A. Scott, *Reining in the State: Civil Society and Congress in the Vietnam and Watergate Eras* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013), 35–44, 49. Uruguayan officials drew up talking points intended to diminish Clark's authority, in part by portraying Clark as a leftist who had not condemned leftist violence in Uruguay. Ramsey Clark y Uruguay, Carpeta 2, Caja 21, Archivo Histórico – Diplomático.

<sup>34</sup>Wilson Ferreira-Aldunate Statement, Carpeta 10, Caja 21, Archivo Histórico – Diplomático. Uruguayan exiles appealed internationally when they recognised that there were not domestic audiences for their claims; before his murder the exiled Uruguayan politician Zelmar Michelini had developed a strategy that beseeched international, and particularly American, audiences to address Uruguayan human rights violations. Markarian, *Left in Transformation*, 7; Mario Sznajder and Luis Roniger, *The Politics of Exile in Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 248.

<sup>35</sup>For more on the influence of exiles in the campaign against Uruguay's human rights violations, see Sharnak, *Of Light and Struggle in Uruguay*; and Markarian, *Left in Transformation*.

<sup>36</sup>Uruguay Campaign, December 1975, Folder 450, AI IS.

<sup>37</sup>Press Release, 16 June 1976, Carpeta 10, Caja 21, Archivo Histórico – Diplomático.

<sup>38</sup>Giambruno to Blanco, 17 June 1976, Caja 3, Adolfo Folle Martínez Cajas, Archivo Administrativo.

<sup>39</sup>See, for example, C266, 12 December 1975, Paquete 1, Caja 18, Archivo Histórico – Diplomático; and C004/12, 12 January 1976, Carpeta 2, Caja 21, Archivo Histórico – Diplomático.

<sup>40</sup>CIA Report, 9 May 1977, CIA Electronic Reading Room; and Sharnak, *Of Light and Struggle in Uruguay*.

weigh the risks and benefits of inviting external observers, suggesting the campaign did pressure the government if not wholly successfully.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to participating in Amnesty's campaigns, holding press conferences, and writing op-eds, Amnesty International USA members Rose Styron and Tom Jones met with State Department officials in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, including Assistant Secretary William D. Rogers, Deputy Assistant Secretary Hewson Ryan, and George Lister in April 1976 to discuss human rights concerns in Latin America. The group's discussion began with Uruguay, demonstrating its significance, with Amnesty members continuing to press the State Department on its characterisations of and responses to abuses in that country.<sup>42</sup> The meeting was one signal of Amnesty International USA's increasing focus on Washington in the mid-1970s, which marked a meaningful shift in its human rights activism.<sup>43</sup>

Those concerned about human rights violations in Uruguay were occasionally focused on a specific political prisoner, and the case of José Luis Massera drew particular attention. In December 1975, mathematicians from the United States and elsewhere, motivated by their professional ties, wrote to Uruguayan officials inquiring about arrested colleagues, including Massera. Inquiries about Massera's detention and health continued from fellow mathematicians and George S. Hammond, the foreign secretary of the National Academy of Sciences.<sup>44</sup> Members of Congress such as Fraser and Brooke also wrote to the Uruguayan ambassador asking for information on Massera's case.<sup>45</sup>

Beyond international NGOs such as Amnesty and the ICJ, the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) was also active in highlighting Uruguayan human rights abuses. Several church organisations had established WOLA to focus attention on human rights violations across Latin America in the wake of the 1973 coups in Chile and Uruguay.<sup>46</sup> One WOLA newsletter reported regarding Uruguay: 'Arrests and assassination, and torture of political prisoners, continues at a high rate. (WOLA will provide anyone interested – including the State Department – with impressive documentation.)'<sup>47</sup> WOLA Executive Director Joseph Eldridge had lived in Chile at the time of the coup there, and the transnational connections he forged in Chile, along with his earlier opposition to racial segregation, shaped his years of work with WOLA.<sup>48</sup> Eldridge and others at WOLA were also inspired by their ties to the Ferreira family. After fleeing from Argentina with his father, Juan Raúl Ferreira worked at WOLA from 1976 to 1979, where he researched

<sup>41</sup>Antecedentes – Hechos, Carpeta 2, Caja 21, Archivo Histórico – Diplomático.

<sup>42</sup>MemCon, 9 April 1976 Folder 25, Box 63, George Lister Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

<sup>43</sup>Markarian, *Left in Transformation*, 90; and Sarah B. Snyder, *From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 169.

<sup>44</sup>See, for example, Bers to Koch, 20 August 1976, Uruguay Correspondence, Box 22, Koch Papers; and Hammond to Pérez Caldas, 15 October 1976, Carpeta 3, Caja 21, Archivo Histórico – Diplomático.

<sup>45</sup>Fraser to Pérez Caldas, 26 October 1976, Caja 15 EEUU, Archivo Administrativo; and Brooke to Pérez Caldas, 27 October 1976, *ibid*.

<sup>46</sup>The National Council of Churches, the United Methodist Church, the U.S. Catholic Conference, and the Quixote Center were instrumental in WOLA's establishment. Joseph Eldridge Remarks, 3 November 1976, Early History, Box 27, Washington Office on Latin America Records, David M. Rubenstein Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereafter WOLA Records); Virginia Bouvier, "The Washington Office on Latin America: Charting a New Path in U.S.-Latin American Relations," Box 28, WOLA Records; Edward L. Cleary, *The Struggle for Human Rights in Latin America* (Westport: Praeger, 1997), 142–4; and Darren G. Hawkins, *International Human Rights and Authoritarian Rule in Chile* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 57.

<sup>47</sup>Legislative Update, December 1975, Carpeta 2, Caja 21, Archivo Histórico – Diplomático.

<sup>48</sup>Interview with Joseph Eldridge, 13 April 2016.

human rights conditions in Uruguay, lobbied members of Congress, and served as a link to the Uruguayan exile community, keeping them apprised of events in Washington.<sup>49</sup>

In response to repression in Uruguay and Argentina, groups such as the Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners in Uruguay and the Uruguay Information Project formed. The Committee of Defense for Political Prisoners in Uruguay, which had members in France and the United States, compiled lists of those Uruguayans killed by torture, murdered, and disappeared, and published a regular news bulletin on political prisoners.<sup>50</sup> In addition, organisations tangentially connected, such as foundations and professional associations, also got involved. And, after the coup in Uruguay, the Ford Foundation worked to support academics who had lost their jobs in subsequent crackdowns.<sup>51</sup> Other religious organisations mobilised as well, including the National Council of Churches of Christ and United Presbyterian Church, USA, among others.

One of the most significant Americans acting in a nonstate capacity on human rights in Uruguay was Louise Popkin. Like other US citizens who became active on human rights in the 1960s and early 1970s, she was motivated by transnational connections and influenced by the domestic social movements of the 1960s. While undertaking doctoral research in Argentina in 1974, Popkin travelled to Uruguay in part to reconnect with an old friend she had met during a 1961–2 Fulbright fellowship in Spain. In Montevideo, she discovered the friend was imprisoned, had suffered torture, and had been denied due process by the government. Her concern for her friend galvanised her work in Uruguay, Argentina, and the United States, on behalf of Uruguayan refugees, political prisoners, and the disappeared as well as against US support for the dictatorship in Montevideo. Although she had been active in protests against the war in Vietnam and segregation, her friendship with a political prisoner in Uruguay drove her to more significant advocacy, including working with defence attorneys in Uruguay and Uruguayan exiles in Buenos Aires.<sup>52</sup> In Popkin's view, Uruguay was receiving disproportionately less interest than Chile, and she sought to garner more attention for the human rights violations happening there. To this end, she researched members of Congress who had opposed the war in Vietnam with the hope that she might be able to interest them in Uruguay. Based on an interview with Popkin, the historian Vania Markarian argues that she was cognisant that a 'moral debate' occupied American politics; Popkin thought it could be harnessed to raise awareness of developments in Uruguay.<sup>53</sup> In the end, a family connection facilitated Popkin's contact with Koch, and he wrote to her in April to alert her that he planned to introduce an amendment ending military assistance to Uruguay.<sup>54</sup> As part of her activism, Popkin corresponded with members of Congress and organisations such as Amnesty International about conditions in Uruguay, including the use of hooding and prolonged standing as standard treatment for detainees.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Markarian, *Left in Transformation*, 123.

<sup>50</sup>Sharnak, *Of Light and Struggle in Uruguay*.

<sup>51</sup>Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 1998), 101.

<sup>52</sup>Interview with Louise Popkin, 3 July 2018.

<sup>53</sup>Markarian, *Left in Transformation*, 79.

<sup>54</sup>Interview with Louise Popkin, 3 July 2018; and Koch to Popkin, 21 April 1976, Uruguay Correspondence, Box 22, Koch Papers.

<sup>55</sup>See, for example, Popkin to Nelson, 15 February 1976, Folder 15, Box 12, Nelson Papers; and Popkin to Fraser, 29 March 1976, Folder 38, Box 114, Nelson Papers.

In the face of proliferating nongovernmental activism and increasing reports of human rights violations, the US government responded in a range of ways. As Uruguay moved increasingly towards military rule, the executive branch tried to remain uninvolved.<sup>56</sup> Such an approach fit with the firmly held belief of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger that human rights practices were a domestic matter that did not warrant US interference.<sup>57</sup> Yet, US officials remained rhetorically committed to democracy. In July 1973 instructions, the US ambassador was urged to tell the Uruguayan president, if asked, that the United States is not 'indifferent to the closing of the legislature' and has 'a preference for democratic procedures', as US president Richard Nixon had said in the past.<sup>58</sup> When Siracusa met with Uruguayan president Juan María Bordaberry in December, he reported via telegram that he had indicated 'a certain sadness that Uruguay's cherished democratic institutions had been to some extent sacrificed or limited'.<sup>59</sup> Yet, Russell E. Olson, a political officer in Montevideo, wrote to a State Department official in Washington that the embassy could not be 'in the position of becoming a policing or investigatory agency pursuing every rumour of human rights violations' because it would jeopardise the 'larger mission'. Olson summarised human rights violations in Uruguay as including censorship, 'some torture', and 'no pattern' of prisoner releases.<sup>60</sup>

In Montevideo, Siracusa warned the foreign minister about a forthcoming Amnesty International campaign against Uruguay and simultaneously reminded the minister 'of the deep moral concern which the US has always had for the rights of individuals'. He reported back to Washington that he had expressed dismay about the manner of arrests taking place in Uruguay, that people 'are taken from their homes without warning and thereafter simply disappear' and reports that detainees suffer physical torture, including water submersion.<sup>61</sup> Later in August 1976 Siracusa cabled Washington that he had shared his concern about the conditions of Uruguayans' arrests and detention.<sup>62</sup> At the time, Uruguayan military officials claimed that only 2017 people were in prison on charges of subversion. This number was meaningfully less than the over 5000 charged by Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists.<sup>63</sup>

Siracusa claimed a consistent message to the Uruguayan leaders: 'Respect human rights and return Uruguay to democracy as soon as possible'.<sup>64</sup> According to Siracusa, the US embassy in Montevideo spared 'no effort at all levels to influence the government, military and civilian', to return to democracy, and 'to clean up grounds for human rights criticism by restoring constitutional rights to imprisoned persons, bringing to prompt and open trials, etc'.<sup>65</sup> Yet, he voiced clear scepticism about human rights organisations, arguing his embassy was better informed than those that made 'outrageous and

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<sup>56</sup>See, for example, Telegram 28424, 14 February 1973, *FRUS, 1969–1976: Vol E-11, Part 2*.

<sup>57</sup>Snyder, *From Selma to Moscow*, 16, 30. The exact reasons for the absence of high-level actors in the documentary record is difficult to assess, however. Kissinger and Ford's memoirs neglect meaningful discussion of Uruguay, with Kissinger only remarking that Uruguay like other countries in the Southern Cone faced 'violent attack from radical, antidemocratic, and antimarket forces'. Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 753.

<sup>58</sup>Telegram 130541, 3 July 1973, *FRUS, 1969–1976: Vol E-11, Part 2*.

<sup>59</sup>Telegram 3712, 26 December 1973, *FRUS, 1969–1976: Vol E-11, Part 2*.

<sup>60</sup>Olson to Brazeal, 8 August 1975, *FRUS, 1969–1976: Vol E-11, Part 2*.

<sup>61</sup>MemCon, 27 January 1976, *FRUS, 1969–1976: Vol E-11, Part 2*.

<sup>62</sup>Telegram 2941, 7 August 1976, *FRUS, 1969–1976: Vol E-11, Part 2*.

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

<sup>64</sup>Ernest V. Siracusa Oral History Interview.

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

unjustified accusations against Uruguay'.<sup>66</sup> He was frustrated with Amnesty International's attention to and classification of Uruguay in contrast to what he perceived of as the neglect of abuses committed in Iran and the Philippines.<sup>67</sup>

Other State Department officials, such as Hewson Ryan, remember that human rights groups pressured the US government to 'intervene' in Uruguay. In Ryan's memory, Kissinger 'was adamant that we would do this by quiet diplomacy'. He remembers that the US 'did a great deal', and asserts that he personally travelled to Uruguay for those purposes.<sup>68</sup> Robert Zimmermann, who also served in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs in these years, recalls that the US was able to play a 'slightly restraining role' in Uruguay, but overall 'was not a great success'.<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, State Department officials sought to deflect congressional and other inquiries about human rights violations in Uruguay.<sup>70</sup> Their efforts to do so, however, heightened attention among activists such as Popkin, who rebutted State Department language regarding Uruguay's human rights record. In Popkin's view, the State Department gave numerical estimates that were too low and ignored evidence of flaws in the Uruguayan judicial system.<sup>71</sup> The ICJ also took issue with State Department characterisations of Uruguayan efforts regarding human rights. The dispute produced a chain of correspondence among members of Congress, ICJ Secretary General Niall MacDermot, and State Department officials.<sup>72</sup> Observers also expressed frustration with Siracusa's defence of the Uruguayan government and with a letter written by labour attaché Don Guerreiro in which he said: 'There may be a few political prisoners around here, depending on one's definition of the term.'<sup>73</sup> To those concerned about political imprisonment in Uruguay, Guerreiro's comments seemed tone deaf. Koch was so exasperated with State Department language that he asserted 'at least one' of the US officials at the embassy in Montevideo 'is either living in a fantasy world or deliberately distorting the truth'.<sup>74</sup> Koch was not alone; one American wrote that the State Department's characterisation of the situation in Uruguay was 'more of a diplomatic than of a factual nature'.<sup>75</sup>

Although State Department officials were willing to engage with activists and exiles, they sought to keep such encounters low level. For example, when Wilson Ferreira and his son Juan Raúl went to the State Department in December 1975, they met George Lister, a low-ranking official engaged on human rights.<sup>76</sup> Siracusa had written to Washington urging that Wilson Ferreira not be received by 'anyone in the Bureau, Department of State, or Executive Branch'.<sup>77</sup> After Ferreira's meeting with State Department officials, Siracusa wrote to Washington that Ferreira was spreading 'rumors' rather than imparting 'facts'.<sup>78</sup> Ferreira had indicated that several hundred Uruguayans in exile might be in danger.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Hewson Ryan Oral History Interview, 27 April 1988, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

<sup>69</sup>Robert W. Zimmermann Oral History Interview, 10 June 1992, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

<sup>70</sup>See, for example, McCloskey to Nelson, 12 August 1975, Box 22, Koch Papers.

<sup>71</sup>Popkin to Nelson, 29 August 1975, Folder 38, Box 114, Nelson Papers.

<sup>72</sup>The correspondence was included in Human Rights in Uruguay and Paraguay Hearings.

<sup>73</sup>Guerreiro to Maguire, 9 April 1976, Folder 15, Box 121, Nelson Papers; and Markarian, *Left in Transformation*, 94.

<sup>74</sup>'The State Department is Being Misled by Our Embassy in Uruguay,' *Congressional Record*, 22 June 1976, 19769.

<sup>75</sup>Jolson to Inouye, 26 August 1976, Uruguay Letters to be put on Robo Cards, Box 22, Koch Papers.

<sup>76</sup>Louise Popkin accompanied the Ferreiras on their meetings with State Department officials in June 1976.

<sup>77</sup>Telegram 295966, 16 December 1975, *FRUS*, 1969–1976: Vol E-11, Part 2.

<sup>78</sup>Telegram 4335, 17 December 1975, *FRUS*, 1969–1976: Vol E-11, Part 2.

<sup>79</sup>Telegram 154322, 22 June 1976, *FRUS*, 1969–1976: Vol E-11, Part 2.

There were, however, exceptions within the State Department. Lister, a human rights officer in the State Department's Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, warned other State Department officials of increasing congressional and nongovernmental interest in human rights violations in Uruguay at the beginning of 1976, declaring that the State Department was 'clearly on a collision course with the Hill and The Movement on this subject'.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, in the aftermath of the murders of exiled Uruguayan politicians Zelmar Michelini and Hector Gutiérrez Ruiz in Buenos Aires, which drew considerable attention to the government in Montevideo's abuses, the US Ambassador to Argentina Robert Hill signalled the US government's dissatisfaction with escalating human rights problems there.<sup>81</sup>

What drove State Department actions regarding repression in Uruguay? By the 1970s, the United States had very limited economic interests in Uruguay. More broadly, during the Nixon and Ford years, Latin America warranted minimal attention from US policy-makers. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger once disparaged the southern hemisphere by saying: 'The axis of history starts in Moscow, goes to Bonn, crosses over to Washington, and then goes to Tokyo. What happens in the South is of no importance.'<sup>82</sup> Yet, in opposing Koch's amendment, the State Department pointed to Uruguay's significance in international and regional affairs.<sup>83</sup> It seems more likely that tradition, as Ryan put it in his testimony before Congress, and Cold War considerations tied to the Uruguayan government's claims that it was fighting leftist insurgents, played a role.<sup>84</sup>

Members of Congress, including Koch, reacted differently than their colleagues in the State Department to the situation in Uruguay. Their perspective was informed by growing receptiveness to nongovernmental pleas regarding human rights abuses, which ultimately forged strong relationships among members of Congress, their staff members, and human rights activists. Examining increased congressional activism regarding human rights violations in Greece, South Korea, and Chile reveals that NGOs and individual activists often served as key conduits of information and support, and these ties help explain why Congress pursued a different approach towards Uruguay than executive branch officials.<sup>85</sup> One of the most significant congressional actions was the holding of hearings on human rights in Uruguay across the summer months of 1976. Representative Donald M. Fraser (D-MN), spurred by others including Koch, scheduled a hearing on human rights conditions in Uruguay. According to Fraser's aide John Salzberg, Fraser set the agenda in terms of the countries on which his subcommittee would focus, but then the representative relied on his aide and his aide's network to populate the hearings with experts.<sup>86</sup> Joseph Eldridge remembers that he had been encouraging Salzberg to hold hearings on Uruguay and had suggested that Ferreira testify.<sup>87</sup>

As the first and star witness, Wilson Ferreira testified before Fraser's House Subcommittee on International Organizations on 17 June 1976, detailing human rights

<sup>80</sup>Lister to Ryan, 22 January 1976, Folder 2, Box 67, Lister Papers.

<sup>81</sup>Dinges, *The Condor Years*, 201–2.

<sup>82</sup>Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), 263; and Sznajder and Roniger, *The Politics of Exile in Latin America*, 248.

<sup>83</sup>Ryan to Koch, 11 June 1976, *FRUS*, 1969–1976: Vol E-11, Part 2.

<sup>84</sup>Human Rights in Uruguay and Paraguay Hearings.

<sup>85</sup>Snyder, *From Selma to Moscow*, 83, 112, 130.

<sup>86</sup>Interview with John Salzberg, 23 September 2016.

<sup>87</sup>According to Eldridge, WOLA had hosted a reception for Ferreira at the Methodist building on the Hill to introduce the Uruguayan exile to members of Congress and their staffers who were interested in Latin America. Interview with Joseph Eldridge, 26 June 2018.

violations in Uruguay.<sup>88</sup> Ferreira asked the United States to ‘stop supporting the dictatorship openly and publicly’.<sup>89</sup> Koch, who attended the hearings, characterised Ferreira’s testimony as ‘superb, very moving’.<sup>90</sup> In Eldridge’s memory, after the hearing, ‘Koch got on fire about cutting off military aid’.<sup>91</sup> As political scientist Kathryn Sikkink has put it, Wilson and Juan Raul Ferreira transferred their ‘passion’ for Uruguayan politics to ‘the transnational politics of human rights’.<sup>92</sup>

At the hearings, Amnesty International Latin American Research Department director Edy Kaufman summarised the organisation’s research on torture and political executions in Uruguay as well as the ‘absence’ of due process.<sup>93</sup> Kaufman also reported on different methods to torture detainees physically, asserting that in Uruguay there was ‘massive evidence of people being tortured’.<sup>94</sup> In Kaufman’s assessment, the consistency across accounts indicated ‘training for torture’ as opposed to isolated instances of excess.<sup>95</sup> With regard to the US response to such practices, as political scientist Martin Weinstein put it, “‘Quiet diplomacy’ – if it exists – has failed miserably.’ According to Weinstein, with its policy, the United States bolstered ‘a brutal dictatorship’.<sup>96</sup>

Members of Congress carefully scrutinised the US record in Montevideo during the hearings. Fraser questioned Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs Hewson A. Ryan very closely about his contention that the American obligation to provide assistance to Uruguay was ‘treaty-like’. Koch also interrogated Ryan aggressively about his suggestion that Wilson Ferreira was out of touch with events in Uruguay and the extent to which Ferreira’s decision to flee the country should be characterised as ‘self-imposed exile’. In antagonistic exchanges, Fraser repeatedly pressed Ryan on what US interests were advanced by continuing to send military and economic assistance to Uruguay.<sup>97</sup> Ryan’s testimony, according to one observer, produced ‘almost hooting and hollering’, given what seemed to be Ryan’s lack of knowledge about Uruguayan human rights practices.<sup>98</sup>

Particularly galling to Fraser and others was Ryan’s blind acceptance of the Uruguayan government’s statements on human rights and the lack of independent State Department analysis on these questions.<sup>99</sup> For example, Ryan cited the number of political prisoners in Uruguay as 2000, a number well below what Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists estimated, but one in line with the Uruguayan government’s assessment. In their questioning, Koch and Fraser expressed frustration

<sup>88</sup>In the wake of Michelini and Gutierrez’s assassinations, Wilson Ferreira fled Argentina, gaining safe haven through the auspices of Austria. Ferreira Aldunate to Videla, 24 May 1976, Folder 15, Box 121, Nelson Papers.

<sup>89</sup>Human Rights in Uruguay and Paraguay Hearings before the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the Committee on International Relations, H.R., 94th Congress, 2nd Session, 17 June, 27 & 28 July, and 4 August 1976. See also Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 51. After the hearings, Ferreira’s property was seized by the Uruguayan government and he was indicted by a military court in Uruguay, steps he and others such as Fraser saw as retaliatory measures. George Goodman, Jr., “Uruguayan Exile Faces Indictment,” *New York Times*, 25 July 1976, 15; and Press Release, 16 August 1976, Folder 15, Box 121, Nelson Papers.

<sup>90</sup>Human Rights in Uruguay and Paraguay Hearings. According to Flynn, Koch ‘really liked’ Ferreira, which made the issue significant to him. Interview with Charles Flynn, 4 May 2018.

<sup>91</sup>Interview with Joseph Eldridge, 26 June 2018.

<sup>92</sup>Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 49–50.

<sup>93</sup>Human Rights in Uruguay and Paraguay Hearings.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*

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

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup>Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 73.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*

with reporting from the US embassy in Montevideo and the State Department's unwillingness to determine that a pattern of human rights abuses existed in Uruguay.

Also influential with members of Congress was WOLA, which 'cultivated an interest and a passion for Latin America with a lot of Members of Congress who otherwise would not have cared about it'. As Eldridge remembers it, at the time, 'Latin America was the backwater of US foreign policy.'<sup>100</sup> Historian Patrick Kelly describes Congress and groups such as WOLA as engaging in a 'symbiotic relationship' as they offered testimony that shaped the congressional human rights agenda.<sup>101</sup> In Kelly's view, WOLA's model of activism was 'novel' because it 'sought to work *with* the wielders of power in Washington, not against them'.<sup>102</sup> WOLA worked to 'educate and cajole' staff members in Congress.<sup>103</sup> Charles Flynn, who was one of Koch's chief aides, remembers that NGOs such as Amnesty International, Freedom House, and WOLA served as a 'pipeline' of information to Koch's office.<sup>104</sup> Like WOLA, the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) also served as a conduit of information on Latin America to US audiences. The organisation had been created in 1966 by academics and published a journal *NACLA: Report on the Americas*, offering news on events in places like Uruguay.<sup>105</sup>

As elected officials, Fraser, Koch, and others enjoyed greater independence than State Department officials who answered to Kissinger.<sup>106</sup> Their activism also benefited from autonomy to hold hearings of their choosing and the ability to exert influence over the slate of witnesses and testimony elicited. Finally, some members of Congress could have been driven by political ambition. In the case of Uruguay, however, Koch and others propelled the conversation regarding human rights violations rather than responded to it.

Koch used his seat on the House Appropriations Foreign Operating Subcommittee to exert pressure on Uruguay regarding that government's violations of human rights. Outside of the subcommittee, Koch worked together with other interested members of Congress, religious organisations, and human rights groups to account for Uruguay's human rights abuses and diminish US support for the government in Montevideo, all with the aim of reducing violations of human rights in Uruguay. In a particularly noteworthy action, as Amnesty's month-long campaign against torture concluded and in response to the organisation's request, Koch inserted its reporting into the *Congressional Record*. In prefatory remarks, Koch labelled the country a 'cesspool'.<sup>107</sup> Subsequently, Koch repeatedly inserted Amnesty's materials into the *Congressional*

<sup>100</sup>Interview with Joseph Eldridge, 13 April 2016.

<sup>101</sup>Kelly, *Sovereign Emergencies*, 185.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 183. Emphasis in original.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 187. Alan McPherson highlights a similar pattern of cooperation regarding U.S.-Chilean relations in the wake of the Letelier assassination. Alan McPherson, "Letelier Diplomacy: Nonstate Actors and U.S.-Chilean Relations," *Diplomatic History* 43, no. 3 (June 2019): 445–68.

<sup>104</sup>Interview with Charles Flynn, 4 May 2018.

<sup>105</sup>Steven Volk, "Against All Odds: NACLA Turns Twenty-five." NACLA's 25th Anniversary Celebration Program, 1992, Box 6, North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) Records TAM 683, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archive, New York University, New York, NY; James N. Green, "Clerics, Exiles, and Academics: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States, 1969–1974," *Latin American Politics and Society* 45, no. 1 (2003): 93–4; and Margaret Power, "The U.S. Movement in Solidarity with Chile in the 1970s," *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (November 2009): 52.

<sup>106</sup>For an example of Kissinger's admonishment of a diplomat who raised human rights in a discussion with a Chilean official, see Seymour M. Hersh, "Kissinger Said to Rebuke U.S. Ambassador to Chile," *New York Times*, 27 September 1974, 18.

<sup>107</sup>Ed Koch, "Uruguay: Torture Chamber of Latin America," *Congressional Record*, 25 March 1976, 8013.

*Record*.<sup>108</sup> In Schoultz's view, Amnesty's campaign against torture in Uruguay triggered Koch's efforts to cut off military assistance to the country.<sup>109</sup>

Markarian argues Koch was 'already known for his efforts to place human rights at the center of U.S. foreign policy' before he introduced his amendment regarding Uruguay.<sup>110</sup> Yet, although Koch had previously worked with Representative Millicent Fenwick (R-NJ) to free the Ukrainian writer Valentyn Moroz, and Koch linked his efforts regarding Moroz and Uruguay in his correspondence with Fenwick, he was less vocal on human rights issues than Representatives Fraser, Tom Harkin (D-IA), Michael Harrington (D-MA), Don Edwards (D-CA), or Dante Fascell (D-FL).<sup>111</sup> As Eldridge remembers it, Koch's interest in Uruguay 'came out of the blue'. According to Eldridge, Koch 'was not in the Fraser orbit'. Therefore, '[t]he fact that [Koch] stepped up and stepped up so forcefully was kind of unusual.'<sup>112</sup>

According to Charles Flynn, Koch was a 'classic Cold Warrior'. His activism shares some characteristics with that of Senator Henry M. Jackson (D-WA) in the same era. Anticommunism drove both their efforts.<sup>113</sup> In Flynn's telling, Koch believed that pressing human rights concerns was a path to ending the Cold War, but he did not want to support any communists in his efforts.<sup>114</sup> Because military officials in Uruguay were targeting centrist politicians such as Ferreira, it struck Koch as a clear-cut case.<sup>115</sup> On the floor of the House, Koch explained his reasons for introducing his amendment as his belief that military assistance had no 'adequate justification' and his characterisation of Uruguay as 'the charnel house of Latin America'.<sup>116</sup> In Flynn's memory, Koch's activism regarding Uruguay was shaped by his meeting with Wilson Ferreira and the personal relationship the two developed. Koch may have also been influenced by Popkin's impassioned reporting; many examples can be found in his congressional papers. Furthermore, Flynn saw progress on Chile as unlikely, and as a pragmatist, saw Uruguay as a better target. In Flynn's memory, 'the administration was so focused on Chile that Uruguay was under the radar screen.'<sup>117</sup> Journalist John Dinges also saw Koch's effort as deliberate. In his view, Koch 'picked a small target' that would not arouse sufficient opposition from the Ford administration, allowing him to win a 'symbolic victory' for human rights.<sup>118</sup> Thus Koch's initiative benefited in multiple ways from the activism surrounding human rights abuses in Chile. Koch used his seat on the Foreign Operations committee as leverage. As Flynn put it: 'If you have a hammer, you use it.'<sup>119</sup> In the wake of his amendment's introduction, Koch had even more evidence of the repression

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<sup>108</sup>See, for example, Ed Koch, "Repression of the Trade Unions and Universities in Uruguay," *Congressional Record*, 9 April 1976, 10373.

<sup>109</sup>Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy toward Latin America*, 84.

<sup>110</sup>Markarian, *Left in Transformation*, 92.

<sup>111</sup>Koch to Fenwick, 23 June 1976, Correspondence, Box 22, Koch Papers.

<sup>112</sup>Interview with Joseph Eldridge, 26 June 2018.

<sup>113</sup>Snyder, *From Selma to Moscow*, 28, 37–8.

<sup>114</sup>Unfortunately, Koch did not record his motivations in proposing the amendment. In his memoirs, he writes about his efforts to cut off military assistance to Somoza in Nicaragua but not Uruguay. Edward I. Koch with Daniel Paisner, *Citizen Koch: An Autobiography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 218. See also Kathryn Sikkink, "The Effectiveness of US Human Rights Policy, 1973–1980," in *The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas*, ed. Laurence Whitehead (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 99; and Robert A. Pastor, *Congress and the Politics of U.S. Foreign Economic Policy, 1929–1976* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 312.

<sup>115</sup>Interview with Charles Flynn, 4 May 2018.

<sup>116</sup>Memo in support of Amendment to End Military Assistance to Uruguay, 4 May 1976, Box 22, Koch Papers; and Ed Koch, "Memo in Support of Amendment to End Military Assistance to Uruguay," *Congressional Record*, 5 May 1976, 12586.

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

<sup>118</sup>Dinges, *The Condor Years*, 215.

<sup>119</sup>Interview with Charles Flynn, 4 May 2018.

carried out by the Uruguayan government against its opponents with the kidnapping and assassination of two prominent politicians: Michellini and Gutierrez.

The State Department opposed Koch's amendment in a number of ways, including by arguing that it would enhance the position of 'hardliners' in the government in Montevideo.<sup>120</sup> Siracusa opposed the Koch Amendment and cabled to Washington that he believed 'the passage of this amendment can do serious damage to our relations with Uruguay'.<sup>121</sup> In a further instance of State Department pressure, Hewson Ryan wrote to Koch to express his disappointment with the amendment.<sup>122</sup> Siracusa remembered later that he had thought that with his amendment, Koch was 'riding the tide of human rights activities for his own political purposes'.<sup>123</sup> In a meeting with Uruguayan and American officials, Siracusa expressed frustration that Congress 'is more impressed with the reports of Amnesty International than the information submitted by the Embassy'.<sup>124</sup>

The State Department's opposition to the amendment, limited engagement with congressional inquiries, and perceived alignment with the government in Montevideo led to considerable tension with members of Congress interested in human rights in Uruguay. This strain played out in congressional hearings, in correspondence, and in the pages of the *Congressional Record*. Notably, in a piece entitled, 'Why Does Not the State Department Come Clean on Uruguay?' Koch asserted that his subcommittee 'has never been told what interests in Uruguay require us to provide military assistance to a country that is the torture chamber of Latin America'. And, amidst a litany of points of disagreement with Hewson Ryan, Koch charged that the State Department 'is proficient at stopping just short of lying'.<sup>125</sup>

Koch assertively rebutted the State Department's position, noting that in three years of 'quiet diplomacy', Uruguay's record on human rights had not improved, and that 'Uruguay affords us no strategic or military advantage, nor does Uruguay face an external threat', which Koch argued made the United States officials 'accomplices in the repression'.<sup>126</sup> Others engaged with the human rights situation in Uruguay rejected administration claims that continuing assistance would enable it to exert pressure more effectively, citing South Korea, Greece, and Chile as examples where little progress had been made.<sup>127</sup> In remarks arguing for his amendment, Koch linked Uruguay to South Korea and the Philippines and articulated his opposition to US assistance to dictators.<sup>128</sup>

In fiscal year (FY) 1976, US military assistance to Uruguay was worth US\$3 million and was devoted to the 'modernization' of Uruguayan forces.<sup>129</sup> The government's request for FY 1977 was at a similar level, although with a significant proportion devoted

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<sup>120</sup>Smith to Luers, 20 May 1976, Folder 5, Box 10, Lister Papers; Executive Branch Position Papers, Caja Unica EEUU, Archivo Administrativo. Uruguay had long purchased military equipment from U.S. companies. See, for example, Memorandum, 6 May 1975, Carpeta 25, Caja 25, Archivo Histórico – Diplomático. American business interests in Uruguay, including the Council of Americas, American Chamber of Commerce, and the American Association of Uruguay, also opposed the amendment on the basis that state violence was justified and not widespread. Kennedy to Member, 26 May 1976, Box 22, Koch Papers.

<sup>121</sup>Telegram 3462, 16 September 1976, *FRUS*, 1969–1976: Vol E-11, Part 2.

<sup>122</sup>Ryan to Koch, 11 June 1976, Uruguay Correspondence, Box 22, Koch Papers.

<sup>123</sup>Siracusa's assessment, made after Koch's three terms as mayor of New York City, is plausible. Koch announced his mayoral campaign in March 1977. Frank Lynn, "Koch Joins the Mayoral Contest; Questions Beame's Competence," *New York Times*, 5 March 1977. Ernest V. Siracusa Oral History Interview.

<sup>124</sup>Memcon, 8 October 1976, *FRUS*, 1969–1976: Vol E-11, Part 2.

<sup>125</sup>"Why Does Not the State Department Come Clean on Uruguay?" *Congressional Record*, 23 August 1976, 27228.

<sup>126</sup>Ed Koch, "Memo in Support of House Position Ending Military Assistance to Uruguay," Folder 38, Box 114, Nelson Papers.

<sup>127</sup>Pastor to Koch, 20 May 1976, Uruguay Correspondence, Box 22, Koch Papers.

<sup>128</sup>Ed Koch, "Latin America: Ending our Support for the Dictators," *Congressional Record*, 10 August 1976, 26986.

<sup>129</sup>Human Rights in Uruguay and Paraguay Hearings.

to foreign military sales credits rather than Military Assistance Program grants.<sup>130</sup> In response to Koch's initiative, the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee voted six to four to end military assistance to Uruguay for FY 1977, rejecting the US\$3.05 million request from the executive branch.<sup>131</sup> The amendment was then unanimously accepted by the full House committee.

After the amendment passed in the House, it had to be reconciled in conference with the Senate. Fraser's message to Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HI) in seeking his support for the amendment was that the State Department was not following existing law, which made the measure necessary.<sup>132</sup> Flynn remembers mobilising a campaign to ensure that the Senate would accept the amendment that involved creating a mailing list of 2000-odd Americans who had written to their representatives opposing any further aid to South Vietnam at the end of the war. Koch then spoke on the floor of the House of Representatives about how significant his amendment was. Staff members mailed Koch's statement to those addressees asking them to write their Senator if they sat on the appropriations committee or directly to Senator Daniel Inouye as chair of the reconciliation effort.<sup>133</sup> In Flynn's memory, 'hundreds of letters showed up', a significant number for the time.<sup>134</sup> One letter writer highlighted the risk to the United States' reputation: 'By supporting military oppression and torture, we are going to turn the people of Latin America against us, not to mention world opinion.'<sup>135</sup> Another noted his five years of service as a Peace Corps volunteer and missionary in Latin America in urging Inouye to support the Koch amendment.<sup>136</sup> Many letter writers expressing concern about Uruguay also linked it to other human rights cases such as South Korea or the Philippines.<sup>137</sup> The efforts of Koch and his staff demonstrate multiple ways in which advocacy can be mobilised, not only to draw attention to human rights violations and secure the attention to key allies, but also to achieve passage and reconciliation of key legislation.<sup>138</sup>

In addition to mobilising letters from individuals who had opposed the war in Vietnam, Koch also reached out to organisations such as the United Auto Workers and the U.S. Catholic Conference. He requested letters be addressed to Inouye and Senator Edward Brooke (R-MA) and ask that the two senators uphold the House's rejection of military assistance to Uruguay.<sup>139</sup> Koch contacted journalists such as James Kilpatrick at the *Washington Star* and invited them to support his effort to have the amendment retained in conference.<sup>140</sup> He also wrote a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* making the case for ending assistance to Uruguay.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>130</sup>Congressional Presentation: Security Assistance Program, Fiscal Year 1977, Folder 15, Box 12, Nelson Papers.

<sup>131</sup>Schultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy toward Latin America*, 256.

<sup>132</sup>Fraser to Inouye, 16 August 1976, Uruguay Correspondence, Box 22, Koch Papers.

<sup>133</sup>One letter writer to Inouye noted that Koch had reached out to him based on his earlier opposition to continuing assistance to the Philippines and South Korea in the face of their human rights records. Rodell to Inouye, 26 September 1976, Folder 2, Box SB272, Subject Files, Daniel K. Inouye Papers, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, Manoa, Hawai'i (hereafter Inouye Papers).

<sup>134</sup>See, for example, Lambert to Inouye, 23 August 1976, Uruguay Letters to be put on Robo Cards, Box 22, Koch Papers.

<sup>135</sup>Brand to Brooke, 25 August 1976, Uruguay Letters to be put on Robo Cards, Box 22, Koch Papers.

<sup>136</sup>Moller to Inouye, 24 July 1976, Folder 13, Box LF356, Legislative Files, Inouye Papers.

<sup>137</sup>See, for example, Abercrombie to Inouye, 8 September 1976, Uruguay Letters to be put on Robo Cards, Box 22, Koch Papers.

<sup>138</sup>I thank Debbie Sharnak for this point.

<sup>139</sup>Schultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy toward Latin America*, 256–7. A UAW staff member did telegram Inouye requesting that he oppose military assistance to Uruguay. Torres to Inouye, 1 September 1976, Folder 2, Box SB272, Subject Files, Inouye Papers.

<sup>140</sup>Koch to Kilpatrick, 24 June 1976, Correspondence, Box 22, Koch Papers.

<sup>141</sup>Koch to the Editor, *New York Times*, 19 July 1976.

When the amendment arose in conference committee, Flynn recalls, Inouye quickly said that the Senate deferred to the House. Flynn regarded this as a ‘great moment’, and remembers that Juan Raúl Ferreira arrived at his office with tears in his eyes.<sup>142</sup> Eldridge considered the news of the amendment in Uruguay as an ‘earthquake’.<sup>143</sup> In Ferreira’s view, the impact of the amendment in Uruguay and outside was ‘tremendous’.<sup>144</sup> According to Flynn, congressional action to end military assistance to Uruguay ‘set the military on its heels’.<sup>145</sup> Both Ferreira and Flynn argue that beyond ending US support for Uruguay’s military, the amendment marked a turning point in the regime’s international legitimacy and domestic survival. In Montevideo, the decision to cut off assistance left those in the Uruguay government feeling ‘aggrieved’ and ‘misunderstood’.<sup>146</sup> Not surprisingly, Uruguayan officials were angered by Congress’ action.<sup>147</sup>

Koch’s efforts regarding Uruguay were two-pronged. In addition to introducing an amendment to cut off military assistance to the government, he also supported a parole visa programme for Uruguayan refugees, particularly those trapped in Argentina.<sup>148</sup> Koch argued that Argentina ‘lacks the ability and the willingness to assure the safety of the political exiles living’ there.<sup>149</sup> Fraser joined Koch’s effort, and the two introduced a resolution asking the attorney general to initiate a process of parole for refugees living in Argentina. To support their proposal, the two cited the need to be consistent in providing a safe haven for those fleeing left-wing and right-wing repression.<sup>150</sup> Their resolution, H. Con. Res. 674, was also initially sponsored by Representatives Charles Wilson (D-TX), Timothy Wirth (D-CO), and Edward Pattison (D-NY); the number grew to 28 members of the House. Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA), who had also developed a personal relationship with Wilson Ferreira, sponsored a similar amendment in the Senate, highlighting how such an effort fit with ‘existing law and U.S. humanitarian tradition’.<sup>151</sup> Koch mobilised a letter-writing campaign directed at attorney general Edward Levi asking that he grant refugee status to those fleeing persecution in Argentina.<sup>152</sup> He also spoke in the House about how Uruguayan forces were ‘waging a campaign of extermination against Uruguayan exiles living in Argentina’.<sup>153</sup> The State Department ultimately asked for 200 visas for refugees in Chile and Argentina.<sup>154</sup>

In November 1976 Koch was re-elected, and he continued working to ensure that the amendment was fulfilled.<sup>155</sup> Koch and allies in the House subsequently sought to bar ‘internal

<sup>142</sup>Interview with Charles Flynn, 4 May 2018.

<sup>143</sup>Interview with Joseph Eldridge, 26 June 2018.

<sup>144</sup>Interview with Juan Raúl Ferreira, 17 April 2018. After the amendment passed, Koch exchanged warm correspondence with Wilson Ferreira, which is now displayed in Montevideo’s Museo de la Memoria. Ferreira Aldunate to Koch, 18 August 1976, Uruguay Correspondence, Box 22, Koch Papers; and 30 September 1976, *ibid*.

<sup>145</sup>Interview with Charles Flynn, 4 May 2018.

<sup>146</sup>Lawrence A. Pezzulo Oral History Interview, 24 February 1989, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

<sup>147</sup>Juan de Onís, “Uruguay’s Military Leaders Angry Over Congressional Cutoff on Aid for Arms,” *New York Times*, 5 October 1976, 13.

<sup>148</sup>Koch to Kissinger, 24 May 1976, Case: Michelini/Ruiz, Box 280, WOLA Records.

<sup>149</sup>Press Release, 7 June 1976, Box 22, Koch Papers.

<sup>150</sup>Fraser and Koch to Colleague, 15 June 1976, Box 22, Koch Papers; and “U.S. Asylum Needed for Chilean and Uruguayan Refugees in Argentina,” *Congressional Record*, 15 June 1976, 18198.

<sup>151</sup>By the time congressional interest in Uruguay was growing in 1976, Kennedy had already been active for several years on the issue of human rights abuses in Chile, both working to end security assistance to that government and to facilitate the entry of Chilean refugees to the United States. Snyder, *From Selma to Moscow*, 122–3, 129–30.

<sup>152</sup>Leichter to Levi, 21 September 1976, Uruguay Letters to be put on Robo Cards, Box 22, Koch Papers.

<sup>153</sup>“Refuge for South Americans Endangered in Argentina,” *Congressional Record*, 20 July 1976, 22928.

<sup>154</sup>Edward Koch, “United States Refugee Policy,” 8 December 1976, Correspondence, Box 22, Koch Papers.

<sup>155</sup>See, for example, Fish to Koch, 19 November 1976, Uruguay Correspondence, Box 22, Koch Papers; and Koch to American Law Division, 23 November 1976, Box 22, Koch Papers.

security' as a priority for which foreign military sales and military assistance could be granted to a country.<sup>156</sup> Koch's amendment made him a focal point for those concerned with Uruguay but also other places marred by repression.<sup>157</sup> Several months later Koch sought to expand his restriction on US military assistance to any government working 'to quell an internal rebellion'.<sup>158</sup>

Shortly thereafter, the Carter administration sent a new ambassador with a 'clear message' about US policy to Montevideo. Furthermore, the new administration did not request any military assistance for Uruguay.<sup>159</sup> In the four years of Carter's presidency, the State Department's country reports were critical of Uruguay's record, with State Department officials assessing 4300 Uruguayans were imprisoned for political reasons in 1977, and no military assistance was granted.<sup>160</sup> The issue of human rights abuses in Uruguay rarely garnered the attention of Carter or Secretary of State Cyrus Vance attention when not connected to more pressing concerns such as the signing of the Panama Canal Treaties in 1977.<sup>161</sup> Nonetheless the administration's assessment that Uruguay's human rights record was 'very poor' foreclosed support for international loans or security assistance.<sup>162</sup> In the years that followed, debates about Uruguay's human rights record largely moved to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). Ultimately, the military government's decision to hold a 1980 plebiscite on a new constitution, which was defeated, ushered in a slow process towards the restoration of democracy in 1985.<sup>163</sup>

Koch, Popkin, Eldridge, Kennedy, and other Americans concerned about human rights abuses in Uruguay were shaped by transnational connections with those facing imprisonment, disenfranchisement, and exile. Primed by Amnesty International's reporting on human rights violations, inspired by interactions with a centrist exiled politician, and galvanised by a growing congressional human rights movement, Koch introduced an amendment that ended military assistance to the abusive government in Montevideo. Koch's amendment was intended to pressure the Uruguayan government and if that was ineffective, to end US complicity in its practices. In the meantime, he sought to alleviate the plight of Uruguayans seeking safe haven from their government by securing more visas for their entry into the United States. For these efforts, he garnered the ire of the US ambassador in Montevideo and Uruguayan officials who threatened, albeit drunkenly, his life.

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<sup>156</sup>H.R. 450, 4 January 1977.

<sup>157</sup>See, for example, Swanson to Koch, 6 May 1976 Uruguay Correspondence, Box 22, Koch Papers; and Hesburgh to Koch, 24 May 1976, *ibid.*

<sup>158</sup>Ed Koch, "The United States Should Not Be Helping to Maintain the Internal Security of Other Countries," *Congressional Record*, 1 February 1977, 3166.

<sup>159</sup>Interview with Charles Flynn, 4 May 2018; and Sikkink, "The Effectiveness of US Human Rights Policy, 1973–1980," 110.

<sup>160</sup>See, for example, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Uruguay (1978), HeinOnline; Markarian, *Left in Transformation*, 122; and Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 73.

<sup>161</sup>Memorandum of Conversation, 9 September 1977, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980: Volume XXIV* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2018), 904–10. For more on the Carter administration's relative passive approach to Uruguay, see Sharnak, *of Light and Struggle in Uruguay*.

<sup>162</sup>Action Memorandum, 9 February 1979, *FRUS, 1977–1980: XXIV*, 924–7.

<sup>163</sup>Intelligence Memorandum, *FRUS, 1977–1980: XXIV*, 936–40.

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