

Hyperbole in Brasilia

Hyperbole is standard fare at banquets for visiting statesmen; but Secretary of State Kissinger's 15-page paean of praise for Brazil—and by implication for its authoritarian military regime—went beyond the bounds of reason. The speech will harm this country's relations with other Latin American nations, give respectability to leftist charges of collusion between Brasilia and Washington, and bolster the image of the United States as supporter of right-wing dictatorships.

It was a speech that will be harmful even to Brazil, for it catered to a kind of "manifest destiny" complex and great-power ambition that are never far below the surface in that country and that have long been a cause of concern to Brazil's neighbors. For the other Americas, especially for those sharing a common border with Brazil, Mr. Kissinger's panegyric will unpleasantly recall President Nixon's greeting to President Medici in 1971 that "as Brazil goes, so will go the rest of the Latin-American continent."

Mr. Kissinger has proposed, in an agreement to be signed today, a special United States relationship with Brazil that in political consultation would be equal to this country's ties with Canada when they were at their closest—now, regrettably, some time ago. In his fulsome toast, Mr. Kissinger promised that Washington would consult bilaterally with Brazil "on all major events of international significance."

If taken seriously, the agreement will raise false hopes as well as fears. Mr. Kissinger deludes himself if he believes the pact will bring Brazil back to Washington's side on such issues as Angola, where Brazil long ago recognized the Popular Movement, or the Middle East, where Brazil voted for the United Nations resolution equating racism with Zionism.

The United States should, of course, strive for good relations with Brazil and should never thwart that country's legitimate aspirations on the world scene, commensurate with its vast size and potential. At a time, however, when President Geisel is retreating under military pressure from even the modest political leavening he had begun, the Secretary of State at the banquet in Brasilia would have been wiser to have been somewhat less than sycophantic.