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## UNITED STATES HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY

[Editor's Note. The following has been extracted from pages 5-6 of the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1984, prepared by the U.S. State Department and presented to Congress in February, 1985. This annual report, mandated by Sections 116(d) and 502(b) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, contains within its 1453 pages separate reports for 164 countries, and is an important reference source for security assistance managers and executives.]

Our human rights policy . . . faces the world as it is, not as we might wish or imagine it to be, with a commitment to active engagement as a consistent approach to a variety of challenging situations. As President Reagan has said, "human rights means working at problems, not walking away from them." This is a pragmatic policy which aims not at striking poses but at having a practical effect on the well-being of real people. At the same time, it is an idealistic policy which expresses the continuing commitment of the United States to the cause of liberty and the alleviation of suffering.

Since America was created in order to make real a specific political vision, it follows that "human rights" is not something added onto our foreign policy, but is its ultimate purpose: the preservation and promotion of liberty in the world. In his address to the U.N. General Assembly in September 1984, President Reagan stated that the United States will continue to view concern for human rights as the moral center of our foreign policy.

Our human rights policy has two goals. First, we seek to improve human rights practices in numerous countries--to eliminate torture or brutality, to secure religious freedom, to promote free elections, and the like. A foreign policy indifferent to these issues would not appeal to the idealism of Americans, would be amoral, and would lack public support. Moreover, these are pragmatic, not utopian, actions for the United States. Our most stable, reliable allies are democracies.

As the second goal of our human rights policy, we seek a public association of the United States with the cause of liberty. This is an eminently practical goal: our ability to win international cooperation and defeat anti-American propaganda will be harmed if we seem indifferent to the fate of liberty. Friendly governments are often susceptible to confidential diplomacy, and we therefore use it rather than public denunciations. But if we never appear seriously concerned about human rights violations in friendly countries, our policy will seem one-sided and cynical. Thus, while the Soviet bloc presents the most serious long-term human rights problem, we cannot let it falsely appear that this is our only human rights concern.

Our human rights policy also has two tracks or sides, the negative and the positive. The negative side is embodied in the way we oppose (through act or word) specific human rights violations in the short term. On the positive side, strongly emphasized by the Reagan Administration, we seek over the long term to help democracy, the surest safeguard of human rights.

It is a fact that most democracies have excellent human rights records; nothing is as likely as democracy to produce this result.

Obviously, the positive track of a human rights policy is not a substitute for an immediate and active response, including sanctions, for human rights violations when they occur. But the Administration believes that we should treat not only the symptoms but the disease--that we should not only respond to human rights violations, but also should work to establish democratic systems in which human rights violations are less likely to occur.

It is therefore encouraging to see real progress coming about in the strengthening of democratic institutions, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, to which President Reagan referred in his remarks commemorating Human Rights Day on December 10, 1984. Noting that today more than 90 percent of the people in that region live in nations either democratically governed or moving in that direction, the President pledged "to our neighbors the continued support and assistance of the United States as they transform our entire hemisphere into a haven for democracy, peace, and human rights."

Our efforts, and those of others, to keep human rights concerns a central focus of international relations face the continuing problem that activist human rights policies such as ours traditionally aim at affecting the domestic behavior of other countries, while governments are reluctant to alter their nation's political system for foreign policy reasons. Since the leverage that the United States does have is strongest in friendly countries, there is a danger that human rights policy might highlight and punish human rights violations in those countries while in effect giving unfriendly countries immunity. Moreover, a nation that came to display a general pattern of undermining or estranging friendly governments would obviously limit its future influence over them, including its influence over their human rights behavior. On the other hand, countries where we have little access and leverage include many countries which both restrict the human rights of the citizens and resist strongly any foreign effort to influence the situation. As an extreme example, a representative of Iran at the United Nations took the unprecedented step in 1984 of declaring that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights does not apply to them.

However, there appears to be growing acceptance, even among countries where human rights are not fully respected, of the validity of an international human rights agenda. Sensitivity to these annual country reports, for example, increasingly takes the form of constructive response, or at least a willingness on the part of the country concerned to engage in a discussion of its human rights image. Many countries which are strong supporters of human rights have, like us, established offices specifically responsible for international human rights policy. It is also noteworthy that in 1985 the thirty-five nations, East and West, who signed the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe will gather in Ottawa for a Human Rights Experts Meeting in May and again in Budapest in October for a Cultural Forum which will also be devoted significantly to discussing human rights.

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