

Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy

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It is somewhat of a challenge for an official of the U.S. Government to come to Sweden and deliver a talk on aspects of U.S. foreign policy. It is a challenge, I believe, not because we are in fundamental disagreement. On the contrary, I believe we are in fundamental agreement, but there are misunderstandings between us. The challenge, it seems to me, is to use this opportunity to make a contribution, be it ever so slight, to the efforts to clear up our misunderstandings.

There is, of course, one basic difference between your approach to world affairs and ours, which is directed by our relative size. Anyone who knows the American people well is aware of the fact that we do not particularly relish our position of leadership in the world. But our numbers--in terms of population, economic strength, and military power--have thrust a role on us from which we cannot escape. Our actions can powerfully affect the course of history. We must live with the fact and act accordingly.

Let me now focus on the specific topic of this talk: human rights as an aspect of foreign policy. In recent years we have become so accustomed to human rights discussions at the international level that we sometimes do not focus on the fact that the introduction of human rights into foreign policy debates is of very recent origin.

The concept of human rights, the notion that the powers of government are limited by the inherent rights of the individual, stems in its modern setting from the writings of the thinkers of the 18th century. But for two centuries the issue of human rights was deemed a matter of purely domestic concern, to be asserted by political groups within a given country in the context of demands for democratic government. Diplomats, even the diplomats of democracies, shied away from involvement in such matters. They continued to adhere to the notion that what a sovereign power does within its borders to its own citizens is not appropriately a matter of concern to other countries.

It was only in the wake of World War II that consideration came to be given to the idea that the issue of human rights should be elevated to the international level. Language to that effect was incorporated into the Charter of the United Nations. But it takes a long time for diplomatic traditions to die. The prevailing view after the adoption of the Charter was that the language contained therein was hortatory rather than operational. Nor did adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 effect an immediate change in this outlook. The barrier was finally broken a few years later, when the United Nations began to discuss the issue of racial discrimination in South Africa.

In retrospect it may not be surprising that, of all the human rights violators of that time, the United Nations would single out South Africa for special opprobrium. After all, the commitment

to the cause of human rights in the Charter had been prompted largely by Nazi atrocities, which had been based on a racist ideology. South African racists practices were uncomfortably reminiscent of Nazi prewar policies even if not of the wartime murders.

As it is, it took the United Nations a long time to progress beyond its single-minded attention to South Africa as the one domestic human rights violator. Other human rights violations were approached most gingerly until the Soviet bloc, after 1973, pounced on Chile, not really for violations of human rights but because of the Brezhnev Doctrine. The rest of us, who sincerely do believe in human rights, joined the effort because of that belief. Thus you can say that an East-West consensus was established even though there was a fundamental difference in motivation.

It was only toward the end of the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s that the list of states subjected to comprehensive criticism in international fora was lengthened to include some as to whose inclusion there was no overwhelming majority consensus.

Beginning with the Belgrade follow-up meeting under the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the scope of discussion was, indeed, extended to include human rights violators within the Soviet bloc. The precedent set in the CSCE process was thereafter followed in the United Nations as well. Thus, only within the last 10 years can we speak of a full-scale, across-the-board discussion of human rights violations in international fora, discussions in which a good many participating states have put aside the traditional inhibitions against such discussion.

In the United States the 1970s also witnessed the development of and, even more significantly, the application of a bilateral human rights policy, a human rights policy which would not only be reflected in speeches at international gatherings but in direct contacts between the United States and the country in question. The Congress of the United States passed a series of laws which linked human rights conditions in specific countries to specific actions by the U.S. Government. Statutory linkage was thus established to most-favored-nation status with regard to tariffs, U.S. government credits and credit guarantees, economic and military assistance, U.S. licenses for the export of equipment used by law endorsement agencies, etc.

In order that it be guided in voting on foreign assistance programs, Congress also enacted a law during the 1970s which required the State Department to submit an annual report reviewing human rights practices throughout the world, country by country. As I have just noted, the objective of the law was to provide the Congress with fuller information on the state of human rights in specific countries. However, this law had, in my opinion, a highly significant and perhaps totally unintended impact on the U.S. State Department.

It was decided early on that the first draft of a country human rights report was to be prepared by the U.S. embassy located in that country. This resulted in ambassadors appointing, in each of our embassies, persons responsible for the preparation of such reports. These persons became known, over time, as our "human rights officers."

Preparing a human rights report on a country such as, for example, Sweden is a rather simple task. It can be done quickly prior to the annual deadline set for the submission for such reports.

But the situation is vastly different in many other states. Where massive human rights violations take place, it may be necessary to have a full-time human rights officer. As the information on human rights violations will often not be readily available, the human rights officer will have to go out to look for it. This will necessarily mean that he must be in contact with persons not particularly well liked by the government in power. Here we have, thus, another break with tradition. Throughout the world in states in which human rights violations occur, the U.S. embassy is consistently in touch with persons who are in disagreement with the policies of

their governments. In many locations the U.S. embassy is the only foreign mission that is regularly in touch with these dissenting individuals or groups.

Though the reports are prepared only once a year, a human rights officer in a country which does have human rights problems must necessarily keep watch across the year. He will try to collect information on human rights violations so as to be able, when the time comes, to write a report that is both comprehensive and accurate. Keeping watch does not, in our State Department, mean writing notes to oneself for ready reference at the time the annual report is written. A Foreign Service officer responsible for a particular subject matter will tend to report on matters in his field as they develop. Human rights officers will, therefore, send telegraphic messages to Washington, which we usually call "cables," letting the State Department know about the latest developments in the human rights field in the country in question. He might even add a recommendation as to what we should do in light of the latest development. An so, day in, day out, throughout the year, there arrive at the State Department in Washington messages from embassies throughout the world, messages prepared by human rights officers, reporting on human rights violations.

Whether or not the embassies recommend specific steps to be taken in consequence of these human rights violations, a report of such a violation will cause the responsible officers in Washington to reflect on these developments and try to reach a conclusion as to what to do about the problem. Through this process, as you can readily see, the entire bureaucracy is sensitized to the point that it almost instinctively seeks to respond.

A report of a human rights violation will occasionally cause us to make a public statement critical of the violating country. In many other instances it will cause us to deliver a demarche or make a less formal representation in the capital of the country in question or with the country's ambassador in Washington or both. The latter type of practice has become known as "quiet diplomacy." Let me emphasize to you that quiet diplomacy concerning human rights can be quite forceful. The term "quiet" means in this context merely that we do not make a public statement on the subject. Quiet diplomacy, I can assure you, is being pressed by the United States most actively and is a truly effective tool in advancing the cause of human rights.

I must emphasize that injection of human rights considerations into the practice of foreign policy in the United States has not meant that our national security concerns can or should be put aside or relegated to second place. Like every other country, we must, in the first instance, be guided by our need for self-preservation. As, because of our size and status, our security can be affected by developments anywhere in the world, security implications must necessarily be weighed in *all* our foreign policy moves. What might be needed to protect our security can and is on many occasions the subject of argument. However, few people will argue over the basic principle that we have a right to preserve our security.

Having made the point about the supremacy of national security concerns, let me add that the United States consistently subordinates commercial concerns to human rights considerations. Beyond that, I would say that there are times when we put security considerations at risk in order to advance the cause of human rights. This may be hard to believe, but I can think of a number of situations which would prove the correctness of the observation I have just made.

I recognize that not only this last remark but a good deal of what I may have said to you today runs counter to the description of American foreign policy methods and objectives as described in the media. Let me simply say that this is where our misunderstandings may start. I, for one, believe in and respect the idealist motivation of Swedish foreign policymakers. As we share these motives, I believe there is a sound basis for dialogue between us and for action along parallel lines. Ambassador Newell [U.S. Ambassador to Sweden], too, fully subscribes to this belief. That is why he urged me to visit Sweden, and that is why I am here today.