

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

What to Do About Human Rights

"Thinking Again About Human Rights"
by Stephen D. Wrage, in *SAIS Review*
(Winter-Spring 1983), 1740 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

The Reagan administration's "quiet diplomacy" on human rights has accomplished little; President Jimmy Carter's approach was vigorous, noisy, but usually fruitless. Between the two, writes Wrage, a Georgetown University lecturer on international affairs, lies the route to an effective U.S. human rights policy.

The Carter administration claimed, justifiably, three successes: saving South Korean opposition leader Kim Dae Jung from execution in 1978, securing the release of some 30,000 Indonesian political prisoners, thwarting a 1978 effort by the military in the Dominican Republic to subvert a presidential election.

At least 100,000 Ugandans perished during Idi Amin's reign (1971-79). But other interests—notably a fear of disrupting international trade agreements—kept Washington from reacting to the dictator's human rights violations with a trade embargo.



In each case, Wrage says, Washington had a well-defined objective. The Carter people used a variety of pressures (e.g., rallying other countries to the cause, threatening to reduce military *and* economic aid as well as trade concessions); they allowed the offenders to find a face-saving solution, often because the regime or some faction within it already favored concessions. These lessons, he argues, should be applied to human rights policy today.

Such an approach would not rule out the kind of "public diplomacy" the Reagan administration so scrupulously avoids. But U.S. spokesmen would eschew the public sermons that attack a foreign regime's very legitimacy and make it hard to win concessions. Washington officials would also have to recognize that, however morally compelling the case for reform in a given country, pushing for change when there is no support for it within the offending government would be futile.

The most effective fighters for human rights, Wrage believes, are

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

such international organizations as Amnesty International or the Red Cross. Where they fall short is in their ability to identify political prisoners and gather other information. Through an intermediary, the United States and other Western nations could supply crucial information to these agencies from embassies and intelligence operations.

"By recognizing the constraints under which we act," Wrage concludes, "and by giving the larger goal of maintaining world order priority over ending oppression, we are likely to do better by ourselves, by world order, and by the oppressed."

Do Diplomats Really Matter?

"The U.S. Ambassador" by James W. Spain, in *The Washington Quarterly* (Spring 1983), Dept. 8010, Transaction Periodicals Consortium, P.O. Box 1262, Rutgers Univ., New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

Despite high-level summit meetings, jet travel, and instant telephone communications, the United States still relies on its traditional network of ambassadors to get most things done abroad.

Indeed, suggests Spain, former U.S. envoy to Tanzania and Turkey, in some ways the importance of ambassadors has grown. They help promote American exports and set trade policy. They shape and administer U.S. economic and military aid programs in their host countries. Even "our man in Kigali" (Rwanda) presides over \$4.5 million in U.S. development funds and \$1.5 million in military assistance. Ambassadors, Spain notes, must be well versed even on "the relative merits of F-4, F-5, F-15, F-16, and F-18 fighter aircraft." Finally, ambassadors are responsible for such delicate matters as negotiating basing rights for the Rapid Deployment Force and interpreting existing treaties.

Washington officials can't match the professional diplomat's on-the-scene experience and personal contacts with foreign governments. And unlike State Department bureaucrats, an ambassador is "master in his own house" and can act quickly. While Washington makes basic policy choices, ambassadors can influence them through their reports and opinions. They also possess an ultimate weapon in policy disputes: the power to cause a public brouhaha by resigning in protest.

The diplomatic corps is not flawless, writes Spain. Arrogance and "clientitis"—an exaggerated sense of the importance of the country they are posted to—afflict many diplomats. Political appointees often view their posts as an "extended vacation abroad."

More sophisticated Senate scrutiny of White House ambassadorial nominees, instead of today's "rubber-stamp" approach, could remedy such defects, Spain says. So could review panels modeled on bar association procedures for judicial candidates. Cutting down on the number of political appointees (52 of today's 140 envoys) would also help.

To correct career Foreign Service officers' insularity and "clientitis," he adds, assignments should be made on the basis of performance, not