

## CHAPTER 4

### RATIONALES BEHIND INCONSISTENCY ON U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS PROMOTION AND ACTIONS

According to the theoretical reason, the United States' national interests in the Post-Cold War era cover extensive areas—freedom, open markets, democracy, and the rule of law.<sup>1</sup> This also includes the “human rights” norm that the U.S. had put as one of the universal values that all nations should be bound to commit to. However, is the United States really concerned about the rights of all humankind or is it just a tool for the U.S. to achieve their own interests?

This section is designed to shed light on a question about the role of human rights in the foreign policies of the United States. Are these rights, at the heart of democratic governance, something for which states are willing to sacrifice gains for, or are they only pursued when it is not economically or strategically costly? The United States shows rhetorical support for human rights yet appears to operate under the notion that it can ignore these principles when beneficial to its own interest. In the twenty first century, economic interest had been the main value behind the United States failing to promote human rights, followed by the strategic and political interests.<sup>2</sup>

#### **A. Violation for the sake of economic self-interest**

Has U.S. foreign policy been mostly dominated by economic concerns? Despite its rhetoric appealing to higher ideals, the United States has supported dictatorships and authoritarian regimes around the world to suit its economic or

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<sup>1</sup> Condoleezza Rice, “Rethinking the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 4 (2008), <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=1&hid=112&sid=48ab85d3-a4af-465e-9205-e591b2bba157%40sessionmgr109&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=a9h&AN=32554472>.

<sup>2</sup> Bethany Barratt, “Aiding or Abetting? Human Rights, Economic Interests, and U.S. Policy Leadership in Foreign Aid Decision” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Palmer House Hilton, Chicago, Illinois, April 15, 2004).

security interest.<sup>3</sup> These quotes suggest that foreign policy is dominated by business interest. But that does not mean all foreign policy decisions are dominated by economic consideration. For example, during the Cold War, American Foreign Policy was dominated more by containment objectives towards the Soviet Union than by business prospects. However, economic interests do play a role if not a prominent one. When the problem is a zero-sum-problem where gains of the United States means losses to other states (likes the access to oil reserve), then economic interest and security interests align and interventions on behalf of those interests are clouded by referring to higher values.<sup>4</sup>

In illuminating the picture how human rights were violated to achieve United States economic interest, research takes at its starting point the inconsistencies of foreign policies aid-giving states towards countries that have dubious human rights record. For example, the contrast between the United States' engagement with China and the ostracism of Cuba. This highlights how potential economic gain from business with China is more of an interest. This inconsistency is observed both in the treatment of different states with similar problems as well as between official rhetoric and real action. This inconsistency in the United States foreign policy towards countries with poor human rights records is called "human-rights double-standard."<sup>5</sup>

Human rights abuse in recipient states will prompt aid reduction or cessation by donors only when the recipient is neither economically nor strategically valuable to the donor. The question is "to whom does foreign aid benefit?" There has long been evidence that foreign aid is far from altruistic and is often based on panoply of considerations apart from the actual neediness of the recipient state.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, it is commonly that the aims that are pursued—be they economic, political or strategic—are based on an overall sense of benefit to the donor country even if that be

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<sup>3</sup> Karsten-Wenzlaff, "Economic Interest in U.S. Foreign Policy?" *Kasi-Blog Online*, <http://www.karsten-wenzlaff.de/2008/02/03/economic-interest-in-us-foreign-policy/>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> House Foreign Affairs Committee, "Ideals vs. Reality in Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy: the Cases of Azerbaijan, Cuba, and Egypt," *Project on Middle East Democracy* July 12, 2007, <http://www.pomed.org>.

<sup>6</sup> Bethany Barratt, "Aiding Whom? Competing Explanations of Middle-Power Foreign Aid Decisions" (paper presented at the 2004 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Palmer House Hilton, Chicago, Illinois, April 14-18, 2004).

only through creating the greater global stability that comes with securing areas of the world which suffer the greatest need. If trade and economic cooperation for mutual benefit between nations is a paramount concern of policy makers, some relations may be so valuable that the donor would rather continue to generate good will through aid than jeopardize access to the recipient by cutting it off. These are usually countries that offer significant trade potential to the donor, provide fertile export markets, and have large or expanding economies. All these countries are less likely to be punished and if they are, punishment will be less severe.

Shortly after the Kosovo crisis ended, the Clinton Administration came out with the “Clinton Doctrine”, which basically stated that the United States would forcefully intervene to prevent human rights abuses when it can do so without suffering substantial actualities, without the authority of the UN Security Council.<sup>7</sup> This is a serious precedent for a powerful country to set since it undermines international law and treaty obligations. The United States has in the past been extremely selective in determining where humanitarian intervention is needed. Allies of the United States have often been gross human rights violators, but those abuses have been conveniently ignored by the United States in order to pursue its national interests (ex. economic liberalization of other nations or ensuring resources that the United States needs remain as cheap as practically possible). In some regions, the United States continues to provide arms to allies that use them to commit gross violations of human rights.<sup>8</sup> For example, Egypt, a crucial United States ally, has remained the second biggest recipient of United States foreign aid for nearly three decades, despite regular poor marks in the United States human rights report in areas such as political freedom.<sup>9</sup>

Another example is that, the United States foreign policy toward China reflects Washington’s core ambivalence on human rights. China is major focus of

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<sup>7</sup> Joe Stork, “Human Rights and U.S. Policy,” *Journal of the Foreign Policy in Focus* 4, no.8 (March 1999): 1-3, <http://www.fpiif.org/briefs/vol4/v4n08hrts.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Anup Shah, “The USA and Human Rights,” *Global Issues: Social, Political, Economic, and Environmental Issue That Us All*, August 21, 2002, <http://www.globalissues.org/article/139/the-usa-and-human-rights>.

<sup>9</sup> Robert McMahon, “Human Rights Reporting and U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Backgrounders, Council on Foreign Relations*, April 9, 2009, [http://www.cfr.org/publication/18939/us\\_human\\_rights\\_report.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/18939/us_human_rights_report.html).

United States commercial and strategic interests, yet China engages in a wide range of severe and systematic abuses. Human rights activists continue trying to keep issues in China prominent but have had little response.<sup>10</sup> As a presidential candidate Clinton had vigorously criticized the Bush administration policy in the wake of the Tiananmen Square massacre. In May 1993, President Clinton issued an executive order linking renewal of trade to human rights improvements, but over the following year sent mixed signals regarding his intention to hold China to those conditions. In 1994, trade benefits were renewed despite the absence of human rights improvements, and the question of linkage was dropped.<sup>11</sup> This proves that the United States not only ignored a previous commitment act upon human rights violations, but it also intentionally deteriorated the human rights situation in those related countries for the sake of its economic interest.

### **B. Other interests: political and strategic interests**

The call for democracy and human rights, while blindly supporting Israel and Arab dictators, are issues that reverberate throughout the Middle East and reflect poorly on American credibility. Bush's democracy promotion agenda failed because it was not fundamentally based on democratic values; instead it was launched as a part of a war against extremism and was accompanied by the invasion of Iraq and the subsequent problems of Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib.<sup>12</sup> The Bush administration also cited human rights abuses as justification for invading Iraq only after no weapon of mass destruction were discovered. But, it seems likely that the weapon of mass destruction and terror links were rationalizations of the wish to topple a regime for other reasons.<sup>13</sup> All were attempts to justify its invasion for the sake of hidden "political interest."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Stork, "Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy."

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights First, "Re-establishing U.S. Leadership on Human Rights and National Security," (the Freedom Forum at the Newseum, Washington DC, United States, April 21, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> William F. Schulz, *The Future of Human Rights: U.S. Policy for a New Era* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Recalling back to the foreign-aid provided by the United States to poor countries, the United States not only overlooked human rights violations for the sake of its own economic interest, but also for “strategic interest.” The strategic value of the recipient is measured in several ways. These measures include the geographic location of the recipient, proximity to trade intersection, location in areas of instability and whether the recipient possesses nuclear capabilities. The states are coded as primary trade intersections if they contain major pipelines or key ports on major shipping routes.