

Elliott Abrams for Human Rights

A Conservative Philosophy for Advancing the Cause of Freedom

Adam Meyerson

"I have only one purpose, the destruction of Hitler, and my life is much simplified thereby. If Hitler invaded Hell, I would make at least a favourable reference to the Devil in the House of Commons." So wrote Winston Churchill in June 1941 to explain why he rushed to the support of Soviet Russia after it was invaded by its Nazi ally. To defeat Nazi Germany, then the world's most expansionist totalitarian force, Churchill felt compelled to succor the tyranny of Joseph Stalin, a regime that had slaughtered 20 million of its own subjects. Franklin Roosevelt made the same grisly calculation, and by the end of the war the United States had furnished Stalin with \$9.5 billion in aid.

Today, Stalin's heirs in the Kremlin have replaced the Nazis as the world's most expansionist totalitarian power. And to stop the worldwide advance of Soviet military might, the United States must often come to the support of anti-Soviet regimes around the globe, even if they don't fully share our commitment to democracy and individual liberties. From South Korea to South Africa, from the Philippines to Guatemala, from Haiti to Saudi Arabia, the United States finds itself publicly identified with authoritarian regimes, some of them quite harsh.

There is no need to feel guilty about supporting such regimes, just as there was no need to feel guilty about supporting the butchery of Stalin during World War II: Our support is based on a practical calculation of how best to fight the most aggressive threat to human rights in the world, and it is by no means an endorsement of everything our allies do.

But support for authoritarian governments does raise practical problems for a nation like the United States that takes seriously its ideals of liberty, democracy, and respect for individual dignity. How can we best encourage democracy and freedom in authoritarian governments without undermining their political stability?

Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs, has been developing a framework for practical thinking about such questions. He has been the Reagan administration's point man both in defending aid to authoritarian regimes before a hostile Congress and human rights community, and in framing

policies for quietly pressuring these regimes to make human rights improvements. Most important, he has been articulating a conservative human rights philosophy that includes, but goes beyond, the fundamental need to stop the spread of Soviet tyranny.

Mr. Abrams's framework begins with the centrality of human rights. Formerly special counsel to the late Senator Henry Jackson and then chief of staff for Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, he has brought to the Republican party from the Jackson-Moynihan wing of the Democratic party a belief that "America's greatest weapon in the struggle with the Soviets is that we are free and represent the cause of freedom." In his introduction to the State Department's 1982 *Human Rights Report*, he wrote that "human rights is at the core of American foreign policy because it is central to America's conception of itself. This nation did not 'develop.' It was *created* in order to make real a specific political vision. It follows that 'human rights' is not something added on to our foreign policy, but its ultimate purpose: the preservation and promotion of liberty in the world."

A More Positive Role

In a recent interview, Mr. Abrams distinguished this Jackson-Moynihan view of human rights from the human rights policy associated with the Carter administration, particularly with UN Ambassador Andrew Young and Patricia Derian, Mr. Abrams's predecessor at State. "Our view, which identifies the cause of freedom with the United States, sees the advancement of human rights as the justification for a strong, active, assertive American foreign policy. The Carter administration view, a product of the anti-Vietnam War movement, is based on a feeling of American immorality, a feeling that America is likely to play a negative role on the world stage and that the less foreign policy we have, the better. Human rights policy in this view is primarily a restraint on American foreign policy. It leads to a limitation on American intercourse with a country like the Philippines or South Korea anytime there are human rights abuses. In

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our view, by contrast, a deeper American involvement might help.”

“As to the question of tactics,” Mr. Abrams has written, “the Reagan administration’s test is effectiveness. With friendly countries, we prefer to use diplomacy, not public pronouncements. We seek not to isolate them for their injustices and thereby render ourselves ineffective, but to use our influence to effect desirable change. Our aim is to achieve results, not to make self-satisfying but ineffective gestures.”

Recently asked to cite some successes of quiet diplomacy, Mr. Abrams said, “The release of political prisoners in South Korea, as a manifestation of a greater feeling of security on the part of the government, is an example of what a warmer relationship with us can bring. The virtual elimination of banning in South Africa—the total number of people banned has fallen from 154 to 11—is something one might attribute to a greater concern about American opinion. Recently, for the first time, several police officers in South Africa have been criminally charged for abuse of prisoners. But is that because of quiet diplomacy? One can never prove that because you cannot demonstrate cause and effect. In any case, the big successes by definition cannot be put on the public record for a period of years.” Mr. Abrams added that he had come to recognize one weakness in quiet diplomacy: “It does not deal with the problem of maintaining the morale of democratic forces in a dictatorship. Even if we manage to get two or three people out of jail, the fact that they have been arrested can be demoralizing to the democrats in that country, and our failure to speak out as loudly as we might, because we are in the midst of back-room negotiations to get them released, is a problem. That argues for speaking out on occasion to give the forces of liberty the boost in morale they need.”

Mr. Abrams argues that seeking democratization and liberalization of authoritarian governments is a “pragmatic,” not a “utopian,” goal for the United States. “Our most stable, reliable allies are democracies,” he has written, and in a recent interview he said that “in many countries there is a national security argument for liberalization. We are urging a number of governments in the Third World to open up their political systems, not because Congress will like it and we will give them an extra \$10 million, but because liberalization is in their interests. The argument—and I would make it for South Korea as well as the Philippines before the Aquino murder—is that if you allow the democratic opposition to play some role in the system, your country will be more stable rather than less so.”

As examples of the dangers of insufficient liberalization, he cites the downfalls of the Shah and Somoza. “At least one lesson is that we don’t always have the luxury of choosing between good and bad. Sometimes we are forced to choose between bad and worse. Over the long run, what we should have done in Somoza’s Nicaragua was to pressure him to behave better, as we do now in a wide variety of countries. We should have tried to support a large and vibrant middle class, we should have tried to keep pluralistic institutions alive. For a long time in Nicaragua, the United States didn’t sufficiently help

the center. I think that the same is probably true in Iran.”

However, Mr. Abrams argues that American encouragement of liberalization in authoritarian regimes should be subject to three important qualifications.

An End to Moral Posturing

The first is that it is important for Americans to have some humility in telling the leaders of a government what is best for them. “Liberalization for purposes of letting out steam always involves line drawing. How much steam should you let out? At what point do you risk anarchy and destabilizing the regime? When a competent ruler such as Pakistan’s Zia tells us, ‘I know Pakistan better than you do and I draw the line here, and the fact that you are drawing the line there shows that you don’t know Pakistan well,’ we have to recognize that it takes a hell of a knowledge of Pakistan to be willing to insist in each and every case that we are right and he is wrong. The line between progress and anarchy is hard for anyone to draw. It’s especially hard for us, as foreigners.”

Second, it is essential to realize that “the line drawn varies from country to country. This is where we get in the biggest argument with many human rights groups, who insist that the process of line drawing is a fundamentally unacceptable process because it puts us in the position of letting some countries get away with human rights violations. But I think that is an unrealistic view of the world. One can ask a great deal of the Philippines because it has proven itself capable of sustaining a democracy over a long period of time. And one can hope that there will be a democracy again in Chile. It is much harder to have immediate expectations about a country like Burma or Zaire, without any democratic traditions.”

Third, as Mr. Abrams put it to the Council on Foreign Relations, “a crucial question we need to ask about every government that abuses human rights is what the alternatives are. Surely this is one lesson we can draw from Vietnam. Just as the opposition in Vietnam consisted of a number of non-Communist elements, so it does in El Salvador; yet we are persuaded that should the Left come to power, there can be no doubt that the armed elements tied closely to the Soviet Union—and hawking the Soviet propaganda line on all international issues—would in fact take over. We think that Soviet power and communism are relevant for two reasons: first, because even a highly imperfect regime may well give a much better prospect of democratization than would the Communist regime that might follow it. It is therefore no contribution to the cause of human rights to replace a regime we can work with and improve, with a Communist regime. And secondly, we know from the cases of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Vietnam that Communist regimes tied to the Soviet Union will not only oppress their own people but will try to export oppression to their neighbors. . . . In the real world the choice is frequently not between good and bad but between bad and worse, or perhaps more accurately, bad but improvable, and worse and permanent. To prevent virtually any country from being taken over by a Communist regime tied to the Soviet Union is in our view a very real victory for the cause of human rights.”

What Do Women Want?

The Three Reasons for Ronald Reagan's Gender Gap

Rachel Flick

Contrary to some suggestions from the Right, Ronald Reagan confronts a gender gap that cannot be wished away. Until 1980 men and women voted almost exactly alike, but when Mr. Reagan ran for president, the genders abruptly diverged at the polls. Mr. Reagan won a landslide victory among men—he had a margin of 20 points—but women divided their votes equally between him and Jimmy Carter. Modestly but undeniably, the gender gap reappeared in 1982, with men favoring Republicans and women favoring Democrats by as much as 6 percent each. By June 1983 the gap had widened again—by some estimates, to as wide as 25 points. Although millions of women are still Republicans, and millions of men are still Democrats, campaign strategists can no longer altogether ignore the sex of their voters.

The gender gap does not result, as some women's groups maintain, from Mr. Reagan's positions on the Equal Rights Amendment and abortion. According to Kathleen Frankovic, director of surveys for "CBS News," 55 percent of men and 53 percent of women supported the ERA in 1982. Similarly, polls reveal little difference of opinion between men and women on abortion. It is possible that women are more likely than men to vote on the basis of these preferences, but exit polls do not indicate that they have done so.

Rather, the gap results from three other sources of female dissatisfaction with Ronald Reagan. Two have to do with women's perceived economic interests. The third, and most consequential, involves what might be called women's point of view.

Women are disproportionately the welfare-dependent poor, a population that has long been disproportionately Democratic (logically enough, as the Democrats stand for higher benefits). The preponderance of women in this economic group is not new, so in itself it cannot be linked to the sudden appearance of the gender gap. What are new and can be linked, however, are the ages and circumstances of the female aid recipient.

A significant number of America's poor women have always been aged, and their seniority has somewhat moderated the Democratic tendencies inspired by their poverty. The old are more conservative than the young,

and poor old women are more conservative than poor young women. Today, though, these voters—who would otherwise be a natural constituency for Mr. Reagan—have turned away from Republicanism because they fear that the president will cut their Social Security benefits.

What's more, fewer of today's poor women are old. An increasing percentage of the female poor are young, unmarried, and caring for dependent children—three characteristics that propel them toward welfare dependency and hence toward the Democratic party. Recipients of federal aid have long been women, and Republicans have never had many of their votes, but the changing composition of this income group, combined with the incendiary issue of Social Security, may well have reduced the GOP's total support among the poor.

Disaffection

The Democratic votes of low-income women thus account for some of the gender gap. But they do not account for all of it. There are simply too few poor voters to make a difference in the final tally. Probably a more significant group of disaffected women comprises workers in "human services"—such fields as health care, social services, and education.

An unwavering theme of the Reagan presidency has been the need to tighten up on that part of the work force that depends on public money. An enormous percentage of America's human services jobs fall into this category, by being directly governmental, dependent on federal demand-inducing programs (such as Medicare and Medicaid), or dependent on federal bloc grants. And seven of every ten of the workers who fill these jobs are women.

In 1980 nearly one third of the 41 million women at work were employed in human services; only 11 percent of men in the work force were so employed. Between 1969 and 1980 social welfare created jobs for 40 percent of the women entering the work force, but only 20 percent of male entrants. The Reagan cutbacks have therefore had a disproportionate impact on women's career

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