

U.S.'S Inconsistency Weakens Its Stand On Human Rights

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Americans have grown accustomed to judging the quality of their government and their President by the state of the economy and the might of the military. Undoubtedly, both are important indicators for a country exercising global leadership. But so are other elements if a nation is to remain an effective and convincing leader.

One is the ability to cooperate with the forces of democracy in the international arena. Another is to side with the oppressed.

In the second category, the Clinton administration's inconsistency undermines the credibility and efficacy of its foreign policy. The State Department issues an annual report on human-rights, but it has come to resemble a ritual that few people value. And the first people to undermine it are some government members.

Thus, the Immigration and Naturalization Service has built a questionable record with its treatment of immigrants. The State Department puts economic globalism ahead of promoting democracy and human rights. And the Justice Department provides shelter for certain despots and genocidal criminals and tries to justify the inconsistencies of other government agencies.

The latest example is the Clinton administration siding with Cuba and U. S. telephone companies in the compensation battle being waged by the relatives of three Brothers to the Rescue pilots executed by Cuban MiGs over the Straits of Florida. Federal Judge James Lawrence King adjudged the Castro government guilty of terrorism and awarded the relatives \$187 million. Because Havana won't pay, King has said that the indemnification can be paid out of Cuban funds in this country.

The White House could have endorsed the judge's decision and displayed unequivocal support for Americans who are victimized by state-sponsored terrorism. In 1996 it made a big show of apparent solidarity with the relatives of the victims. Now it joins the telephone companies and - with spurious arguments - defends Cuba.

One such argument is that ETECSA, the Cuban telephone company from which the first \$6 million would be taken, is not an enterprise of the Castro regime. You be the judge: Havana controls more than 80 percent of its shares and keeps the company in the hands of Cuba's military brass.

The contacts that the administration promotes between the people of the United States and Cuba should not be pursued at any cost, certainly not at the cost of covering up terrorist acts against American citizens. Clinton earned a sharp tongue-lashing from Judge King: ``The executive branch's approach to this situation has been inconsistent at best. It now apparently believes that shielding a terrorist foreign

state's assets is more important than compensating for the loss of American lives."

Worse, there's a pattern of our government taking the wrong side of justice. Washington also is fighting a court order to indemnify, with more than \$247 million, an American family whose daughter was murdered in Israel by Palestinian terrorists financed by Iran. And it opposes a \$67 million suit from three Americans who were held hostage by Iran-sponsored terrorists. It looks with suspicion at Terry Anderson, held captive for seven years in Lebanon by pro-Iran Shiites, because he has sued Teheran for \$100 million. Other presidents treated Anderson like a hero.

It's always a pity to have to remind a government of the need to respect and promote human rights. But it's pathetic to do so when it's a democracy that pretends to exercise international leadership. By now, human rights need no justification. What demands justification is the inability of certain leaders to take human rights seriously.

The Clinton administration doesn't have to resort to guns to show concern about human rights, as it has done in Yugoslavia. It might do better by taking less spectacular and less risky steps. For example, it could release information that could help try Augusto Pinochet for his political crimes in Chile; it could help investigate the excesses that were committed during the civil wars in Central America; it could cooperate unhesitatingly with the World Court on War Crimes; and, of course, it could support the lawsuits filed by its citizens against terrorists disguised as legitimate chiefs of state.

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