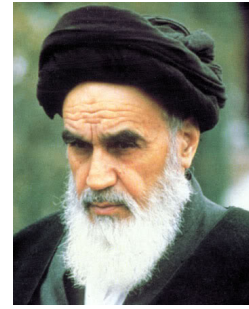




Dictatorships and Double Standards



Jeane Kirkpatrick, later US ambassador to the UN (1981-85), made harsh criticisms of President Jimmy Carter's foreign policy in a November 1979 article in Commentary magazine. Kirkpatrick compared traditional dictatorships, such as those of the Shah of Iran, favorably to radical communist or Islamist dictatorships, such as those set up by the Ayatollah Khomeini after the Shah was deposed).

Background: Jimmy Carter's Presidency (1977-81) saw major foreign policy reverses for the United States. The USSR invaded Afghanistan; American allies in Nicaragua and Iran were overturned; the US broke off diplomatic relationships with our Cold War ally Taiwan; and 52 Americans were held hostage in Iran 444 days. The world was not viewing America as a superpower.

Kirkpatrick's points in her article:

Carter's foreign policy, emphasizing human rights, made rather unrealistic demands on America's allies who were dictators (such as the Shah, or Somoza in Nicaragua). Democracy takes a long time to develop. Over six centuries elapsed between the Magna Carta in 1215 and the British Reform Bills of 1832 and 1832. Carter refused to support either the Shah or Somoza when civil conflict forced both out of office, and radical dictatorships replaced them.

Authority in traditional societies is based on personal loyalty to a strongman. Destabilizing these bonds by weakening or eliminating a leader, in a time of military insurrection, weakens the loyalty that unites the community, and induces armies to abandon their posts.

Kirkpatrick gave two ways in which traditional dictatorships could be demonstrated to be significantly better than their radical religious & socialist revolutionary counterparts:

(1) There are many more refugees from communist countries, than from those run by traditional military dictatorships. Communist societies have produced 6 million refugees through the late 1970s. Cuba, for example, has produced 1 million refugees (one out of every nine Cubans), compared to the military dictatorships in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, which produced just over 100,000 refugees combined.

(2) There was also a much stronger possibility of these traditional dictatorships transforming into democracies, or at least, making major strides in that direction. There is no instance of a revolutionary socialist government transforming into a democracy (without outside pressure), although there are examples of this happening in traditional dictatorships (such as Spain, Brazil, and Argentina). Although it looked like Nicaragua might be an exception to this idea, in recent years the Sandinistas (who overthrew Somoza) won power in elections that were so fraudulent that the US and the European Union suspended their aid in protest; and they have since changed the Constitution to allow their leader Daniel Ortega, to stay in power indefinitely.