HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

WORLD REPORT 1990

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An Annual Review of Developments and the Bush Administration's Policy on Human Rights Worldwide

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Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch monitors and promotes observance of internationally recognized human rights worldwide.

PREFACE

For the past eight years, Human Rights Watch has published a report surveying the US administration's human rights policy in many of the countries that we monitored. This year, for the first time, we have expanded the report to include not only an analysis of the administration's policy but also a description of human rights developments in the countries under review. We have also added a description of Human Rights Watch's work with regard to these countries.

This survey covers 51 countries, spanning every region of the world. The list of countries reviewed is not a comprehensive inventory of all governments that commit serious abuses of human rights, nor is it a catalogue of every nation in which US human rights policy warrants analysis. Rather, it reflects the countries where Human Rights Watch has devoted its greatest energies -- an allocation which in turn reflects the seriousness of abuses, our access to information, our ability to affect human rights practices, our priority on maintaining a balance in our work cutting across various significant political and other divisions, and our limited resources. Within each country, as well, the issues covered do not necessarily span the scope of human rights abuse, but reflect the areas to which Human Rights Watch has devoted its attention.

A compilation of this magnitude is a joint effort involving a large number of people, including the entire research staff of Human Rights Watch. The contributors were: Kenneth Anderson, Cynthia Arnson, Cynthia Brown, Holly Burkhalter, Mary Jane Camejo, Holly Cartner, Richard Carver, Allyson Collins, Catherine Cosman, Alex de Waal, Richard Dicker, Martha Farmelo, Janet Fleischman, Eric Goldstein, James Goldston, Patricia Gossman, Jeannine Guthrie, David Holiday, Michael Jendrzejczyk, Sidney Jones, Robert Kushen, Jeri Laber, Ellen Lutz, Anne Manuel, Mary McCoy, Juan Mendez, Joyce Mends-Cole, Robin Munro, Aryeh Neier, Rakiya Omaar, James Paul, Jiwon Park, Ben Penglase, Patricia Pitman, Dinah PoKempner, Edwin Rekosh, Clifford Rohde, Jemera Rone, Kenneth Roth, Kirby Simon, Patricia Sinay, Jeffrey Slade, Karen Sorenson, Thant Myint-U, Joanna Weschler, Andrew Whitley, Lois Whitman and Ted Zang. Scott Turner provided invaluable assistance in the physical production of the volume. The report was edited by Kenneth Roth.

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INTRODUCTION

Advocates of human rights could not have asked for a more auspicious introduction to the new decade. The revolution in Eastern Europe that rang out the 1980s appeared to be a resounding victory for human rights -- an affirmation that individual liberty could triumph over tyranny, and an inspiration for those still required to live under rulers who tolerated little dissent.

One year later, the heady optimism of those who toasted the upheavals in Berlin and Prague as the dawning of the human rights era appears sadly premature. The demise of world communism proved only a step on the long and difficult path to respect for human rights.

The Bush administration, squandering the opportunity presented by the Cold War's end to launch a principled and consistent defense of human rights worldwide, allowed the Persian Gulf crisis and other considerations to introduce a new set of inconsistencies into US human rights policy. Since August 2, the administration has courted even those nations that were considered pariahs because of their gross abuse of human rights if their support was considered important in the Gulf crisis. In the process, previous US objections to their human rights practices were muted or forgotten.

The significance of the Eastern European revolution should, of course, not be understated. The remarkable transformation seemed to inspire emulation even in such unexpected places as Albania, Mongolia and Nepal. To varying degrees, its effects were also felt in the Sandinista acceptance of electoral defeat in Nicaragua; Algeria's first free elections since independence; the legalization of the African National Congress, the release of Nelson Mandela and the lifting of the state of emergency in South Africa; the rejection of plans for a one-party state in Zimbabwe; the move toward multiparty democracy in such African nations as Angola, Benin, Gabon, the Ivory Coast and Zambia; and the electoral ouster of Communist governments in certain republics of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. Even the successful completion of multiparty elections in Chile and Haiti may have been eased by the European precedent of long-time dictators stepping down.

In many countries, however, self-appointed rulers were unimpressed by the Velvet Revolution, showing little restraint as they fought to preserve the spoils of power. In Burma (Myanmar), the main opposition party won an overwhelming majority in the first multiparty elections in thirty years, but military authorities simply refused to recognize the results; they crushed opposition protests by shooting into crowds of peaceful demonstrators and arresting and torturing dissenters. In Kenya, the government cracked down on independent publications, arrested human rights lawyers and fired on peaceful demonstrators in an effort to preserve one-party rule. In Ethiopia, the government crushed student demonstrations that began as protests against the execution of army generals and became rallies for democratic freedom. At year's end, the military in Suriname overthrew the elected civilian government which it had allowed to take office only two-and-a-half years earlier.

In some states, agitation for democracy and human rights remained unthinkable as tyrants clung firmly to power with scant regard for political and civil liberties. Over a year and a half after the Tiananmen Square crackdown, many hundreds involved in the Chinese democracy movement remained in custody, facing trials and, in some cases, execution. Cuba's Fidel Castro greeted calls for national dialogue with arrests and "acts of repudiation" by organized mobs. Iraq's Saddam Hussein displayed the same ruthlessness toward the resistance movement in Kuwait as he had for years toward those suspected of dissent at home. Syria's Hafez al-Asad enjoyed a similar growth in his scope of repression as he cemented control over much of Lebanon, promising an end to the bloody civil war but threatening a definitive end to Beirut's former status as the center of intellectual debate in the Arab world. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates remained impervious to liberalizing trends, as did such disparate nations as North Korea and Sudan.

Even when movements for democratic change made progress, it was often at a considerable price. In Nepal, at least 50 pro-democracy demonstrators were killed and hundreds were arrested and tortured before the King agreed to pass power to a civilian coalition for the holding of multiparty elections. In Haiti, security forces arrested, beat and exiled opposition leaders seeking an end to military rule, before allowing a civilian government to take office and organize elections that were won by a charismatic populist priest.

Moreover, once dictators loosened their hold on dissent, or were forced to relinquish power altogether, the path that lay ahead for their nations was often quite treacherous. Nineteen-ninety was the year that ethnic tensions and animosities which had smoldered below the surface under the tight grip of authoritarian rule burst forth with a vengeance. Some -- notably Daniel arap Moi of Kenya -- cited such conflict in neighboring countries as evidence that multiparty elections and respect for human rights were incompatible with an ethnically diverse society. Similar arguments could be heard from Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew and Malaysia's Mahathir Mohamad as reasons to perpetuate the use of detention without trial in their ethnically diverse nations. But a closer look showed that the ethnic violence of 1990 repeatedly supported the opposite conclusion -- that ethnic differences are frequently exacerbated by the machinations for power of authoritarian rule, and that only a society built on open debate and free association can develop the art of political compromise on which tolerance must be based.

To cite but several examples: The once ethnically harmonious state of Liberia collapsed into fratricide when the enmities bred by ten years of ethnic favoritism exploded in a rebellion to overthrow the brutal Doe dictatorship. Violent clashes between ethnic Hungarians and Romanians, and violent persecution of the Gypsy minority, were the legacy of Ceausescu's exploitation of Romanian nationalism. Factional killings in South Africa traced their roots to the crumbling divide-and-rule policies of apartheid and were fostered by forces intent on maintaining white rule. Nationalist tensions turned to bloodshed in Armenia, Azerbaidzhan, Kirgizia, Moldavia, Tadzhikistan and Uzbekistan as Soviet rule loosened in the absence of democratic institutions for peaceful resolution of disputes. Warfare among the clans of ethnically homogeneous Somalia was the product of Mohamed Siad Barre's brutal favoritism.

These ethnic conflicts were only one illustration of the simple but often forgotten truth that overthrowing tyrannical regimes -- even if they are replaced with elected governments -- is only the first step in promoting respect for human rights. Of course, that lesson was long apparent in any number of countries where periodic elections, while often heralding an improvement in respect for freedom of expression and association, provided no guarantee against a variety of violent abuses. In Peru and Colombia, the presidency changed hands after national

balloting in 1990, but internal wars continued, marked by executions of civilians and other gross abuses by both guerrillas and counterinsurgency forces. Brazil's first directly elected president in a generation brought no end to summary executions of common crime suspects by the police, or to the practice of ignoring or abetting violence by wealthy landowners and their hired killers against those who disputed their land claims. In El Salvador, Guatemala and the Philippines, elected governments remained unable to control armies intent on fighting insurgents without regard for human rights standards. Israel's elected government expended little effort to investigate fairly and punish excessive force by Israeli troops in confronting the intifada, as in the massacre of 17 Palestinians and the wounding of hundreds on Haram el-Sharif, or the Temple Mount, in Jerusalem. In all of these countries, abuses persisted because civilian governments lacked the will to bring abusive forces to justice for their crimes.

But the failure to bring violators to justice was not limited to nations still experiencing violent conflict. Even in several countries that found a peaceful end to internal strife, "reconciliation" was the watchword as 1990 became the year of forgetting past abuses. Impunity reigned, performing an injustice to the victims and serving as an invitation to future abuses should rulers deem them necessary.

In Argentina, the nation that had stood out for its efforts to bring to justice the military architects of its "dirty war," a recurrent series of army rebellions led the civilian government to pardon and release the last of the convicted mass murderer generals still in prison. The persistent dominance of the government by those associated with the old regime meant that prosecutions for past abuses were nonexistent in Bulgaria, and carefully tailored in Romania to avoid exposure of anything beyond the killings of Ceausescu's final days. In Nicaragua, an amnesty, passed by the Sandinistas with opposition support, meant an end to investigations into past abuses, even as several graves of Sandinista victims were unearthed. In Chile, Pinochet's continuing hold on the army, and the fragility of civilian authority over that institution, prevented prosecution of those responsible for murder, disappearance and torture during the 17-year dictatorship, and even exerted pressure on a government commission working to establish the truth about the abusive past not to publish its report.

The only positive exception to this trend of forgetting was the Greek government's year-end reversal of its decision, in the face of popular outrage, to pardon three leaders of the military junta that ruled the nation from 1967 to 1974 and tortured, jailed and exiled thousands of Greeks. Few nations, however, were willing to follow the example of Nelson Mandela who, shortly after his release from prison, publicly acknowledged that the African National Congress had been responsible for abuses, declared that these practices were being ended and asserted that those responsible were being punished.

There were other disturbing trends in the context of armed disputes. The military confrontation in the Persian Gulf highlighted a troubling resurgence in the withholding of food as a method of warfare. The United Nations' embargo on food shipments to Iraq, though consonant with the international laws of war governing the dispute with Iraq, unleashed a weapon that by its nature was destined to harm civilians more than soldiers. Hopes that a starved Iraqi population might be driven to overthrow Saddam Hussein seemed cruel in light of his proven ruthlessness in suppressing dissent. The Iraqi leader, in turn, tried to turn the food weapon into a propaganda tool by refusing to allow the distribution of food by UN-authorized neutral agencies, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, again with the result that Iraqi civilians bore the brunt of the hardship.

Meanwhile, the use of the food weapon found parallels in several internal conflicts. In Sudan, the government blocked delivery of food to rebel-held areas in the south. In Ethiopia, both the government and Eritrean rebels stopped food destined for areas held by the other. In Angola, attacks by UNITA rebels on all commerce led the rural population to a state of complete dependence on relief shipments of food. Although by year's end progress had been made in some of these conflicts in establishing the right to neutral food deliveries, no such progress was visible in the Persian Gulf.

Two other methods of warfare prevalent in 1990 must be singled out because of their effects on noncombatants. The use of contact land mines continued to take a horrendous civilian toll in such countries as Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia and Mozambique. These inherently indiscriminate weapons left a trail of dead and maimed, frequently among peasants and their children, who sought only to tend their fields

or scavenge in the forest for firewood. Often these casualties occurred long after fighting in an area had ceased, as government and rebel forces left these deadly parcels which are often virtually impossible to find until stepped upon by some future innocent.

The use of civil patrols as a counterinsurgency technique also led to persistent abuse. Apart from the violation of the patrollers' own rights through the coercion often employed to recruit them -- such as the simple but deadly threat of being labeled a "subversive" -- these untrained and undisciplined forces were let loose to combat real or imagined enemies, with predictably devastating results. In Colombia, "civil defense patrols," though formally outlawed, continued to form the basis of the paramilitary groups that, working on behalf of powerful economic interests and with the support of senior army officials, accounted for the largest portion of the thousands of political murders committed each year in that country. In Afghanistan, government-organized paramilitary forces from various tribal groups proceeded to rob returning refugees, loot property and illegally take prisoners. In Sudan, Popular Defense Forces established by the government gave legitimacy to ethnic- and religious-based militias responsible for massive violent abuses. In Guatemala, army-created civil patrols murdered human rights activists seeking to uphold the constitutional right not to patrol. In Cambodia, government-organized militias exacted "tolls" from travelers and deployed mines that injured themselves and their civilian neighbors. In Iran, self-appointed patrols known as Hezbullahis, which were tolerated and in some cases endorsed by the government, insulted, attacked and beat women who did not conform to their rigid interpretation of Islamic strictures.

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With so much to be done to stop these abuses, it was a source of deep disappointment that the promotion of human rights assumed such a low place on the Bush administration's agenda. With the Cold War over, the administration had an ideal opportunity to move human rights to center stage in US foreign policy. Efforts to advance human rights no longer had to be weighed in terms of the contest between the superpowers. But all too often the administration wasted this opportunity. In US dealings with country after country, human rights remained in the wings, as a variety of new-found priorities gained the spotlight.

The minor part left for human rights became most obvious following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Somewhat predictably, the administration did get exercised over horrendous Iraqi abuses in Kuwait. President Bush even spoke publicly about Amnesty International's report on that subject, perhaps the first time that he had cited such a document. Of course, the outrage he rightfully expressed was difficult to square with the billions of dollars of loans and credit guarantees that the administration and its predecessor had extended before August 2 to the same Saddam Hussein, when it was well known that he had gassed Iraq's Kurds and sent countless suspected dissenters to a grim fate of imprisonment, torture and execution.

But worse than a case of hypocrisy, the conflict over Kuwait was a ruinous blow for US human rights policy, as the Bush administration cozied up to one tyrant after another in its single-minded pursuit of an anti-Iraq coalition. Instead of the Cold War litmus test used during much of the 1980s -- with US allies in that contest being largely exempt from human rights criticism -- the Bush administration substituted the Desert Shield test. The Berlin Wall gave way to a line in the Saudi sand as the divide between those adversaries (and their friends) who were publicly criticized and those allies who were not.

To challenge this double standard is not to oppose the prospect of going to war to reverse Iraqi aggression -- an issue which is beyond the mandate of Human Rights Watch. Rather, it is to object to the administration's readiness to tender human rights as a bargaining chip in its zeal to rally an anti-Iraq coalition. It is to protest the emergence of a new double standard in US human rights policy rivaling the worst inconsistencies of the Cold War era.

The list of new found allies benefiting from this policy reads like a *Who's Who* of tyrants:

- After 13 years in which no US President would shake his bloody hand, Hafez al-Asad won a personal audience with President Bush for Syria's contribution of a small military force to combat its long-time enemy. Not a word was publicly uttered about human rights.

- Iran under President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was the beneficiary of a post-August 2 US willingness to let a $250 million World Bank loan come to a vote -- still formally opposing it, but effectively permitting its passage -- despite widespread imprisonment of dissenters, persecution of women and religious minorities, and application of the death penalty to sexual offenders and, on a mandatory basis, to those caught with drugs including addicts.

- Ethiopia's Mengistu Haile-Mariam, with his strong anti-Iraq posture on the UN Security Council, found the post-August 2 Bush administration willing to overlook his use of food as a weapon and his indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas, breaking from a long US tradition of criticizing Mengistu on human rights grounds. Secretary of State James Baker met twice with the Ethiopian Foreign Minister, the first such high-level meetings in 17 years. As in the case of Iran, the US has not used its considerable influence to prevent votes at the World Bank on extending some $100 to $150 million in loans to Ethiopia.[1]

- Certain allies who had long enjoyed immunity from most US criticism -- with the exception of the State Department's increasingly reliable annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* -- had that immunity bolstered by their supportive role in the Gulf crisis. It became almost unimaginable that the State Department would publicly broach any number of "sensitive" topics, be it Egypt's crackdowns on Islamists, King Hassan II's silencing of dissent in Morocco, Saudi arrests of women demonstrating for the simple license to drive, or torture in police cells and the displacement of Kurdish villagers in Turkey.

Perhaps the biggest beneficiary of the Desert Shield test was China, with its potential veto on the Security Council. The administration's much-abused ban on high-level contacts with the Chinese government, imposed after the bloody Tiananmen Square crackdown on

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[1] Since Zaire replaced Ethiopia on the Security Council on January 1, 1991, President Mobutu Sese Seko stands poised to become the next abusive leader to reap the benefits of the Desert Shield test.

the democracy movement, came to a definitive end in November when President Bush and Secretary Baker met in Washington with the Chinese Foreign Minister -- only six days after two prominent journalists were charged with the capital offense of sedition. This diplomatic payoff was followed by an economic one in December, when the administration allowed a $114 million World Bank loan to come to a vote, the first loan to China not for humanitarian use since the crackdown. To its credit, the administration then sent Richard Schifter, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, to Beijing to discuss political prisoners. But Chinese officials mocked the visit by publicly distinguishing between their willingness to discuss human rights and their unwillingness to act on the discussions. The administration further diminished the visit's value by refusing to release a copy of the list of political prisoners which Schifter had given the Chinese authorities, evidently out of fear that the list would become a way of charting Chinese responsiveness to US human rights concerns, and thus might become a determinant of US policy toward China.

In contrast, in some countries that had no significance to the Gulf crisis -- and where other US interests were not in conflict -- the administration took a strong stand for human rights:

- Most noteworthy was the administration's rupture with the murderous army of Guatemala. Strong criticisms of escalating killings and disappearances, from both Washington and US Ambassador Thomas Stroock, were reinforced at year's end with an announced suspension of US military aid to Guatemala because of the unprosecuted murder of a US citizen.

- In Haiti, US Ambassador Alvin Adams, with help from a timely visit by Vice President Dan Quayle, publicly affirmed that the United States would not countenance a repeat of the November 1987 electoral bloodshed. In an important deviation from US practice, discussed below, Ambassador Adams also called for prosecution of those responsible for certain notorious past abuses, albeit while avoiding any specific attribution of responsibility to the military. When a chastened military allowed elections to go forward in December and a radical priest emerged the overwhelming choice for President, Ambassador Adams and Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Bernard

Aronson publicly dispelled any illusions within the Haitian army that the United States might welcome a coup.

- The administration persisted in its firm opposition to the military rulers of Burma, calling them a "xenophobic know-nothing group that maintains itself in power through sheer force." Continuing its policy of suspending all aid to Burma until the military steps down, the administration publicly called on the military to hand over power to the victors of the May elections and protested the arrest of opposition leaders.

- While applauding important changes in South Africa -- such as the release of Nelson Mandela and the lifting of the state of emergency -- the administration was careful to note the substantial steps still to be taken to dismantle apartheid. The administration also consistently reaffirmed that the conditions for easing sanctions had not been met, even during President F.W. De Klerk's unprecedented visit to Washington.

- The administration continued its firm stance in opposition to the dictatorship of Mohamed Siad Barre in Somalia, where massive human rights abuses led the Bush administration to end traditional US support for the Barre government in mid-1989 and to stop most US aid. State Department officials issued strong condemnations of Somali government abuses in suppressing dissent and combatting a host of insurgent forces.

One change for the better related to the Gulf crisis was the administration's stance on killings by Israeli security forces. Through most of the year, the administration claimed to depend largely on "quiet diplomacy" to convey human rights concerns to the Israeli government. In May, for example, in the first Congressional hearings on Israeli human rights practices since the intifada, Assistant Secretary Schifter refused in his opening remarks even to repeat criticisms that his office had made in the *Country Reports*. That changed following the Iraqi invasion, when the administration began seeking Arab support for its efforts to liberate Kuwait. In October, the administration responded to the Jerusalem killings by supporting for only the second time in a decade Security Council resolutions that were critical of Israeli practices in the occupied territories. The US joined another such resolution in December, when the