

Critical Support for Undemocratic Allies

Dan Fefferman

May 1975

From The Rising Tide

An important question in the formulation of United States foreign policy is what attitude we should take toward authoritarian or "right-wing" regimes.

The answer to this question depends very much on one's perception of the moral and strategic interests of the United States in world affairs.

The world in which we live is roughly divided into two politico-ideological camps: the Democratic and the Communist. Within this subdivision are further distinctions: the Soviet Union and its vassal states, China, and now several dubious aligned states such as Yugoslavia, Romania and North Korea within the Communist camp; the United States, Western Europe and Japan, and a number of smaller nations in the democratic camp. The Third World, or non-aligned emerging nations, of course, is also becoming increasingly important.

Totalitarian Governments The Communist camp, formerly controlled in a disciplined manner from Moscow, is now politically divided. However, the common ideological features of every Communist state pose a common, serious threat to all freedom-loving nations and individuals. Communist states are officially committed to the philosophy of Marxism, which teaches militant atheism, irreconcilable class struggle, economic determinism, and violent revolution as the only means of qualitative social change.

Communist states are also committed to Leninism, which teaches that Marxist revolution must be carried out by an elite "vanguard" party, which has the historical responsibility of implementing Marxist programs "by any means necessary," explicitly including terror, summary executions without trial, lying, extortion and state control of the news media.

Communist states are also committed to democratic centralism, by which "all power to the people" translates into "all power to the workers committees," to "all power to the Communist Party" which directs the workers committees, to "all power to the Central Committee of the Communist Party," to "all power to the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party," to "all power to the supreme leader of the people."

In this way, the dictatorship of the proletariat becomes the dictatorship over the proletariat. And because the Communist system includes both ideological and political dictatorship, it is a total dictatorship. Thus the term "totalitarian" was derived. The citizen of a Communist society is free neither to engage in dissident political action, nor to choose his place of employment, nor to speak his mind in public, nor to worship as he pleases, nor to live where he pleases, nor to leave his native land, nor even to think his private thoughts if he falls under the suspicion of the omnipresent State. Moreover, Communist states are committed to the destruction of the "capitalist" world. Communist leaders consistently reiterate that "peaceful coexistence in no way signifies a weakening of our ideological struggle" (Brezhnev).

Marxist-Leninist ideology explicitly calls for the violent overthrow of capitalism and the institution of a dictatorship by the "vanguard party of the proletariat" until such time as the working class can be imbued with "revolutionary consciousness." Thus the overthrow of capitalism in no way means the convergence of two systems or the peaceful establishment of liberal democratic socialism. It means ruthless Leninist dictatorship and the suppression of all individual liberties guaranteed in our Bill of Rights.

These things considered, it is not difficult to see why democratic forces must be prepared to give "critical support" to anti-Communist regimes which are authoritarian in political style.

Authoritarian Government

These governments are qualitatively different from Communist regimes. First, though they may be political dictatorships, they are usually not totalitarian. That is, they allow certain important freedoms such as freedom of religion, freedom of movement, freedom of employment and varying degrees of freedom of speech, press, assembly and thought.

Second, authoritarian regimes are not a threat to world peace. They tend to be nationalistic rather than internationalistic. They may at times engage in border disputes with neighbors but pose no threat to the international balance of power. (Merely authoritarian regimes, although denounced as "fascist" by the left, differ in this respect from the Nazi and Imperial Japanese regimes.

Fascism denotes a totalitarian ideology based on the belief in the superiority of a race and nation; this racism-nationalism was the motivating force of Fascist expansionism in WW II.)

Third, authoritarian regimes tend not to endure. One can show numerous examples (Portugal, Thailand) of authoritarian regimes which have been overthrown. There is no example of a Communist state which has been de-Communized or even liberalized to any significant degree.

Finally, in authoritarian regimes, certain channels for change remain open. Travel is free. Independent newspapers often flourish. Philosophical investigation is allowed. The government does not usually commit itself to the establishment of a monolithic ideological society.

In these respects, authoritarian regimes qualitatively differ from Communist states.

Democratic Support

In debating the degree of support which a free country gives to a semi-free one in an effort to protect against the establishment of a regime in which no real freedom is allowed, one historical fact must be considered. Semi-free societies which are anti-Communist in nature tend to become more free as they become more secure. Thus, the strong commitment of the United States to defend countries threatened by Communism is the best assurance of their liberalization. Cambodia, the Philippines, South Vietnam and South Korea are examples of regimes which became less liberal as the U.S. commitment to defend them became less credible and their fear of Communist advances increased.

This is not to say that liberalization is never to be encouraged by the United States or by private groups within the U.S. These cases, of course, must be decided according to the particular situation involved. For instance, U.S. pressures on South Africa to liberalize its racial policies not only help increase the rights of blacks, but may in the long-run prevent the outbreak of rebellions which could play into the hands of the Communists, black or white. Thus in some cases, pressures for liberalization may be justified from both the long- and short-run humanitarian viewpoint.

Our attitude of critical support, in one way, could be compared to that of the Trotskyite Communists. The Trotskyists disapproved of Stalin's personality cult, his handling of the Russian economy, and the degree of tyranny he imposed. However, as Leninists, they approve of violent revolution, terror, and elite leadership by the revolutionary vanguard "by any means necessary." As Marxists they recognize the Soviet Union and China as -- albeit perverted -- "workers states."

This, to them, is far better than any capitalist society, especially the United States. Thus, though they criticize the excesses and mistakes of the Stalinists and Maoists, the Trotskyists almost always offer them support in the struggle against "capitalism" or "imperialism." Like the Trotskyists, we must know who our primary enemy is.