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## A "CIVILIZED" USE OF UNITED STATES POWER

JEANE J. KIRKPATRICK \*

- Q: You've said that the election of Ronald Reagan means a dramatic reorientation of US foreign policy. How will this affect the style and substance of your approach to the UN?
- A: What I will do, insofar as I can, is put my voice, put my weight on the scales on the side of the reorientation of US foreign policy. I think that it ought to be changed in many ways, and I will use whatever limited influence I have to help bring about those changes.
- Q: Can you be specific?
- A: Sure. I think that the most important change ought to be a change in the goals. I think that what ought to be the goal of US foreign policy is the pursuit of a civilized

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\*Jeane J. Kirkpatrick is the new United States Ambassador to the United Nations. Previously, she taught at Georgetown University and has been a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. The following interview was conducted by Inter Dependent Editor Frederic Eckhard in New York on March 12, 1981. It is reprinted with permission from the Inter Dependent, Volume 7, #2 (March 1981). The Inter Dependent is an international affairs publication which is published by a coalition of non-profit groups headed by the United Nations Association of the United States.

conception of the American national interest. And I think in recent years we have come to believe that the pursuit of the US national interest, however civilized, was not a morally acceptable purpose of foreign policy. The restoration of that as a centerpiece of our foreign policy is, in my opinion, the most important aspect of the reorientation that's required.

Second, I believe that we need to be more realistic about the necessity of restoring American strength and, from time to time -- again, in civilized ways, in measured ways -- using American power. I think we've been trying to run a foreign policy without power, without any kind of power except moral strength, and I think that's very unrealistic and that it doesn't work very well. It doesn't protect our moral goals, and doesn't protect the freedom of other people and doesn't protect the self-determination by the people very well.

Q: But you see morality as an important component...

A: Of course I do.

Q: ...but balanced by power?

A: No. I think in politics, as in life as a matter of fact, that power is a necessary aspect of the pursuit and protection of moral goals and principles. It's like when you've got the playground bully picking on the little kid. You can appeal to his conscience and he goes on picking on the little kid, and then you may eventually have to move in with some force and move him out. There you've got a very clear-cut example of the use of power -- not necessarily violence, by the way, but power to achieve a moral goal. And I think the same sort of thing is true with foreign policy.

Q: In your American Legion speech you talked about a new consensus among the American public, a desire to see the strength and influence of the United States restored...

A: And self respect.

- Q: How would you rate US influence in the United Nations and what might you do to increase it?
- A: You know, I wouldn't rate US influence in the United Nations; I don't feel competent to do that yet. How will I go about trying to increase US influence? Oh, by trying hard to listen carefully and find common ground, emphasize common interests, develop good relations with people.
- Q: At your first press conference you said you had done a study of public opinion...
- A: I've been studying public opinion for years and years.
- Q: What's your reading of what the American public wants of its UN Ambassador?
- A: I don't think that's clear from the public opinion polls. If I look not at the public polls so much as at the letters that I've received from lots and lots of people since my appointment, I judge that what they would like is civilized defense of American interests within the context of generally respectable behavior. I think they want me to behave in ways that will be acceptable to other people, but also to defend American interests, to speak up, to have confidence myself, respect for our traditions and our institutions.
- Q: You emphasize the notion "civilized." What does that connote to you?
- A: I think an uncivilized conception of the US national interest would be one which took no account of anybody else and which took no account of moral principles. A civilized conception takes account of other people as well as ourselves and also takes account of our moral commitments.
- Q: You've also mentioned a survey that shows that support for the UN among the American public is not as strong among the foreign policy elites as it is at the base. Why do you think that is?

A: Oh, because I think that there's a residue in the American public of great hopefulness about an institution like the United Nations. There's a strong streak of idealism in the American public, and the idea of a convention of nations in which problems can be resolved by reason and discussion rather than by force and violence is enormously attractive to the American people. I think the residue of that optimism remains. The public is less well informed, of course, than the foreign policy elites. The foreign policy elites were probably reflecting more dissatisfaction with specific outcomes in recent years rather than reacting to a more generalized optimism and hope.

Q: Such as actions against Israel?

A: No... you know, against freedom of information and that kind of thing.

Q: You've been reluctant to accept the term "third world" as a meaningful description of a political grouping of nations. Yet the US rather consistently comes up against a rather impressively solid voting bloc of third world nations at the UN. Do you think that that bloc is not politically meaningful?

A: Well, insofar as it is a bloc that functions politically, it's politically meaningful.

Q: But you don't find it useful to describe it as the "third world"?

A: Well, I haven't yet. Maybe I'll learn some things at the United Nations to cause me to change my mind.

Q: In your article Dictatorships and Double Standards [Commentary, November 1979] you said that no problem of US foreign policy is more urgent than that of formulating a morally and strategically acceptable program for dealing with nondemocratic governments threatened by Soviet-sponsored subversion.

A: Right.

- Q: Can support for repressive regimes ever be morally acceptable to the American public?
- A: Support? Yes, I think so. Under conditions of lesser evil. I think a great deal of policy is made, by the way, in terms not of the greater good, but the lesser evil. And just as alliance with the Soviet Union in World War II could be a morally acceptable posture expedient for fighting Nazism, so I think that support of regimes a good deal less repressive than the Soviet Union can be a morally acceptable expedient for meeting certain other kinds of greater evils.
- Q: You have been critical of US policy in the past on this score...
- A: I was critical of the Carter Administration precisely because I don't think they took account of the question of lesser evils, degrees of evils. I don't think it ever occurred to the Carter Administration, for example, that by participating actively in the departure of the Shah they might be in fact laying groundwork for a more repressive government, which I think happened.
- Q: So you're not talking about moral absolutes then?
- A: Oh no. I should say not. We're talking about a question of relative evils, relative goods.
- Q: The Reagan Administration has spoken out forcefully against international terrorism, yet it just lifted a ban on military co-operation with Chile. That ban was laid down as a result of the US finding that the Chilean Government had been implicated in a terrorist action resulting in the death of an American citizen on the streets of Washington. Is that a double standard?
- A: I should say not. I mean, you know, that happened quite some time ago. And there've been very substantial improvements in Chile since then. And furthermore, I do not believe that the moral quality of a regime can be the only question which we weigh in the balance in deciding our relations with it. You know, we maintain relations

with a good many regimes in Africa, let's say, whose practices are not those that I would approve of or, I suppose, you would approve of.

In addition to which, one moves on. Nations move on. People move on. I don't think that the fact that the Chilean Government was probably involved in a violent crime in Washington should be the basis for an eternally negative relationship between the United States and Chile. We know a great deal about Soviet crimes in the United States or Cuban crimes in the United States, and I deplore those, and I think we ought to oppose them just as strenuously as we can. But I do not believe that the fact that such things have occurred ought to be the grounds on which we make all other decisions about relationships with the Soviet Union, or whether we enter SALT negotiations or whether we go to a summit.

Q: Our military support to El Salvador, coupled with other statements the Administration has made, has drawn criticism from some of our allies that we are tending to side with right-wing governments. Is that an unfair criticism?

A: I think it's probably true that we would side with right-wing governments as against left-wing governments, where the left-wing governments were associated, were integrated into the Soviet bloc. I think that ought to be clear. Do we in principle like right-wing autocracies? I don't suppose we like any kind of autocracies. I suppose we'd like all governments to be democratic. As far as the criticism by our allies is concerned, I think that what we have are allies with limited alliances. We don't approve of all the actions of our allies; they don't approve all the actions of ours.

Q: In your writings you seem to place a strong emphasis on Communist subversion as a destabilizing factor in third world countries...

A: No I don't either. That's not true. That's not generally true. I write about France and I don't place an

emphasis on Communist subversion. I wrote about Iran and I didn't place an emphasis on Communist subversion. I wrote about Central America and I did, but it was a specific area. Let's be clear. Specific cases. I don't have a conception of the political world such that I sort of see Communist subversion in all parts of the world at all times. I'd like to be clear about that.

Q: What I was getting at was the degree to which economic privation and political repression, internal factors in other words, are as much a part of the problem...

A: What problem?

Q: The problem of instability, staying within the context of El Salvador, for example...

A: You know, that's a very fashionable contemporary error, in my opinion. Economic privation exists in India, economic privation exists in Uganda, it exists in most of the world. You can't explain specific events like a specific insurgency in El Salvador by reference to a condition which has existed for centuries or that exists in two-thirds of the world. If you want to explain that insurgency, then you have to begin with that insurgency, not with the condition that antedated it by a century or that exists all around it.

Economic privation is an ill in itself; it's a bad thing. It causes people to suffer. Political revolution is something that takes place sometimes in some places, and it is carried out by revolutionaries. And, by the way, that's who's doing it in El Salvador. And if privation were the causal factor fueling insurgency in El Salvador, the FDR [Revolutionary Democratic Front] would be in power today because most of the people in El Salvador are miserably poor and most of them don't support the junta. And the proof of that is that Frente [the Front] in its final offensive got no support, no popular support. They understand that even themselves. It shouldn't be so hard for us to understand it.



Q: You've said emphatically that the situation in El Salvador does not risk leading the US into another Vietnam.

A: I have.

Q: Specifically, in what ways are the two cases different?

A: I think a more interesting question is why anybody would think it does, and I think I know the answer. I think that there are a good many people who are so appalled and intimidated personally by the use of power of any kind, that they think that any use of power will lead to the most dreadful things.

Now there are lots of reasons that it's totally unanalogous; the most important one is geographic, actually. El Salvador is very near us, and Vietnam was a long way away. That's not the most important reason; that's the second most important reason. The most important reason is that now we've had the experience in Vietnam. [American philosopher] Morris R. Cohen always said that the biggest difference between human beings and other objects of study, like sugar cubes or something, was that human beings change as a consequence of being studied. We changed as a consequence of having had the experience of Vietnam, and we're not going to make those particular kinds of mistakes again.

There were, I think, some identifiable mistakes that could happen only once, because we hadn't done it before. We're going to be much more deliberate, much more self-conscious about those pitfalls. And when you add that to geographical proximity and limited objectives, and different terrain and different kinds of surrounding countries, differences in power and differences in the supply routes by which the rebels are supplied, it's just a different sense, that's all.

Q: Senator Moynihan recently wrote a critique of the Carter Administration's UN policy, saying in effect that it placed undue emphasis on North-South relations, was

unnecessarily apologetic about the US role in the world and rolled over and played dead in the face of resolutions unfairly critical of the US and of Israel. Do you disagree with that?

A: No. I agree with that.