



Americans Should Look at Their Conduct: China Points to US Human Rights Abuses

Doug Bandow

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The People's Republic of China is rapidly regressing on human rights, returning to the sort of political totalitarianism of the mad "Red Emperor" Mao Zedong. Personal autonomy remains largely unfettered, but Xi Jinping has created an expansive and brutal security state which punishes the slightest criticism of or dissent from his and the Chinese Communist Party's authority.

There is no excuse for the regime treating the PRC's 1.4 billion people as automatons. Yet Beijing is ostentatiously extending the same controls to Hong Kong, destroying what once was an oasis of liberty within the Chinese system. The same fate certainly awaits Taiwan if it is swallowed by the colossus next door.

The good news is that nothing is forever in China. After Mao's death in 1976 came political relaxation, economic liberalization, and personal liberation. Before XI took power in 2012 the authoritarianism, though real, was loose. A similar reversal could occur when XI mercifully leaves the scene. America should play the long game and avoid inflaming pre-existing nationalist currents and causing patriotic Chinese to defend the XI dictatorship. The Trump administration's maladroit attacks on the CCP – most recently restricting visas to tens of millions of party members – is more likely to hurt than help the cause of liberty in the PRC.

In any case, U.S. officials have little cause for the sanctimony that normally infuses their human rights lectures to the world. China repeatedly made this point in 2020, citing not only police abuse of African-Americans but also military attacks on Muslims.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang observed: "It must be pointed out that the wars staged by the US in the Middle East over the past years have caused countless Muslim casualties and displacement as well as turmoil in the region. As has been proven, it is precisely the US that has infringed upon Muslim human rights." He added that withdrawing from the Iran nuclear accord "neglected international law and its international obligations," and that "such practices are the root cause of current tensions." Indeed, the administration narrowly avoided starting another, and potentially even more terrible war, against Tehran.

Of course, Beijing is hypocritical and sanctimonious as well in making such charges. *Tens of millions of people died* during the madness of Mao's rule in China, yet the current regime continues to venerate the psychotic Red Emperor, whose body (or more likely, wax likeness) lies in repose in a massive mausoleum in Tiananmen Square. Such is the way of the world.

Nevertheless, in criticizing US military policy the Chinese are right, and their point has been underscored by America's utter blindness to this terrible reality. US foreign policy has been deadly to Americans. But it has been catastrophically murderous to other peoples. Nothing that

XI Jinping has done, including establishing reeducation camps in Xinjiang, compares to the consequences of the wars started by Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama. *Nothing*.

The worst of the bunch is Iraq. The costs, human and economic, are impossible to know for sure. Nearly 8,700 US and allied troops and contractors were killed. Tens of thousands were wounded, many grievously. It is not uncommon to see men with military haircuts and artificial limbs in the Washington, D.C. environs.

However, the Americans killed and wounded at least had a choice on joining or working for the military. Not so Iraqis, who were killed in prodigious numbers after being "liberated." The lowest estimate of dead Iraqi civilians is 110,000, but that dates to 2009. The Iraq Body Count, which includes those reported or acknowledged in some official form, is between 185,454 and 208,493. However, IBC emphasizes that these numbers are a huge undercount, since lots of deaths go unrecorded when a city is consumed by sectarian war. Doubling that number might be a fair estimate, IBC suggested. Even that might be low. Surveys, utilizing respected but contested methodology, figured the number of deaths could be as high as 1,033,000.

These numbers say nothing about the other human costs. Iraqis who were wounded, imprisoned, kidnapped, tortured, extorted, and displaced. US policymakers living safe, prosperous, and healthy thousands of miles away abstractly talked of military objectives and the importance of not overlearning negative lessons while their policies left the nation occupied by America in chaos and flames. Their attitude was similar to that of President Donald Trump, who apparently told an approving Sen. Lindsey Graham that war on the Korean peninsula would be no big deal since "If thousands die, they're going to die over there. They're not going to die here."

By 2007 some two million people were displaced by the invasion and subsequent sectarian war. Many eventually returned, but some areas remained unsafe and many homes were occupied by others, resulting in a long-term exile population, stuck elsewhere in Iraq or abroad. Hundreds of thousands settled in Syria, only to be targeted by jihadist rebels and again displaced after civil war erupted there. With the 2014 rise of the Islamic State, an outgrowth of al-Qaeda in Iraq, which rose to battle US occupation forces, another 3.3 million Iraqis were driven from their homes. Last year some two million people remained displaced, more than half for more than three years. Overall, 6.7 million people, almost a fifth of the population, required humanitarian assistance at the end of 2019.

Afghanistan is another horror show exacerbated by US policy. Obviously, there are many parties deserving of blame in more than four decades of civil war. As of the end of last year, the Watson Institute at Brown University figured that the Afghan war had cost 157,000 lives, of whom 42,000 were Taliban, 64,000 were Afghan security personnel, and 43,000 were civilians. Some 2.5 million people have fled the fighting. The US is directly responsible for some of those deaths and refugees, through misdirected air and drone strikes. Many others suffered from prolonging a war that could not have been sustained without Washington's participation.

In Libya the US and Europe deceptively encouraged regime change under the guise of protecting civilians. The civil war, or really civil wars, has gone on for nearly a decade. And the humanitarian consequences have been horrid. Reported the National Interest Foundation: "Since the onset of Libya's civil war in 2011, civilians have disproportionately borne the brunt of violence committed by bellicose parties. Libya has been fractured since the 2011 Arab Spring movement that deposed longtime authoritarian leader Muammar Qaddafi."

As many as 25,000 people died in the initial 2011 conflict, a low-grade struggle fought with old, dumb weapons. In just the first year after fighting flared again in 2014 some 4,000 died. Several hundred have been killed this year. Fighting in Libya, with a base population of 6.5 million – it also had attracted many migrant workers – has driven as many as a million people from their homes. Even more require humanitarian assistance to survive. Desperate refugees filling overloaded boats in a desperate hope to cross the Mediterranean to Europe has become a staple of the news. Although Washington did not begin the civil war, it prolonged it in 2011 and ensured new rounds of fighting by removing Muammar Ghadaffy, whose rule looks ever better compared to the violent chaos which followed his ouster.

It is particularly difficult to assess casualties in civil wars. In Syria between 400,000 and 600,000 died. US propaganda aside, this was not a genocide perpetrated by one side, in this case Bashar al-Assad. It was a civil war in which there were few good guys – the US perversely ended up aiding jihadists, including the local al-Qaeda affiliate – and both sides killed promiscuously. How many of those deaths are on Washington is impossible to assess with any precision. However, the Obama administration's early assertion that it was committed to ousting Assad left the regime and rebels alike with little reason to negotiate. Arming and training insurgents, which benefited some of the worst extremists, made the conflict longer and deadlier. Thousands, at least, died as a result of Washington's meddling in another people's tragic civil war. Today brutal – and shameful – US sanctions, designed to inhibit reconstruction, are immiserating an already desperate and impoverished population.

A subset of the Syrian conflict was the fight with ISIS. Overall, some 180,000 people died in that conflict: 67,000 Islamic State combatants, 51,000 security personnel, 50,000 civilians, and 11,000 other allied troops. ISIS would not even have existed but for the Bush administration's illegal and deadly invasion of Iraq. And the Islamic State would never have had an opportunity to wreak such havoc had the parties avoided full-scale war at the start, which Washington perversely discouraged.

Yemen is another horror show promoted by the US. A year ago the Watson Institute figured the human toll at 90,000 dead, 12,000 of whom were civilians, who died disproportionately in Saudi and Emirati airstrikes. The destruction of civilian infrastructure and institution of a naval blockade have created a humanitarian catastrophe, the worst in the world, according to the United Nations. Disease and starvation stalk the land. Roughly 80 percent of the people, some 24 million, are estimated to need assistance. The Emiratis also have unjustly imprisoned and tortured Yemeni opponents while promoting separatism in the south of the country.

Responsibility for these consequences are shared by all combatants, but Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates bear the bulk of the blame since their air attacks have caused between two-thirds and three-quarters of the death and destruction. And Washington has enabled nearly six years of overt war crimes. The US sells and services the aircraft. For a time American tanker planes refueled Saudi warplanes. With Washington's approval US firms supply the bombs dropped on Yemeni civilians and combatants alike. Finally, the Pentagon provides intelligence for targeting purposes. Riyadh and Abu Dhabi could still have promiscuously committed murder and mayhem without US aid. However, without political support, diplomatic cover, and military backing, they would have paid a higher cost for their crimes and been under much heavier pressure to end the war, thereby saving Yemeni lives.

Of course, American policymakers did not initiate all these conflicts. Iraq is fully on the Bush administration and has proved to be a terrible crime against Iraqis and their neighbors. In the others Washington entered ongoing fights, usually exacerbating and prolonging the carnage. The lack of specific intent matters is of little consolation to the victims. In every instance the deadly consequences became evident early and the US persisted anyway. It certainly didn't take long for the Obama administration to realize that the Saudis and Emiratis planned to pursue a brutal war on civilians, but Washington officials, including some nominated to high position by President-elect Joe Biden, simply bleated the usual pieties about encouraging America's allies to kill less wantonly while filling the aggressors' armories.

Does all this mean that Americans cannot speak out on human rights in China or elsewhere? Of course not. The PRC is wrong to cruelly oppress its own people. However, US officials should step back and more honestly assess their own conduct.

Despite Beijing's manifold crimes, it has not gone to war in four decades. Over the same period Washington has promiscuously warred against other nations, causing civilian deaths, economic hardship, social chaos, and physical destruction. America should concentrate on cleaning up its own behavior before it tries to dictate to the rest of the world.

Doug Bandow is a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute. A former Special Assistant to President Ronald Reagan, he is author of Foreign Follies: America's New Global Empire.