Introduction

Commitment to human rights concerns as an important element in US foreign policy hung in the balance in the 1980s. Far from being the tacitly presumed self-evident truths of today, human rights, and the degree to which respect for these ought to inform American foreign relations, was a highly contested subject.[1] The 1970s had witnessed a breakthrough for human rights concerns in US foreign policy, emerging in Congress during the Nixon administration and culminating with the presidency of Jimmy Carter, who made human rights the centerpiece of his foreign policy.[2] At first, it seemed unlikely that the breakthrough would continue in a decade where President Ronald Reagan proclaimed he would undo the human rights-based foreign policy of his predecessor. At the new administration's first National Security Council meeting on February 6, 1981, Reagan declared: "We must change the attitude of our diplomatic corps so that we don't bring down governments in the name of human rights […] We don't throw out our friends just because they can't pass the 'saliva test' on human rights."[3] In the following months, the administration's rhetoric, diplomacy, and bureaucratic appointments reinforced the intent to downgrade human rights.

Yet, during the 1980s, the administration's approach to human rights changed to such a degree that the journalist Tamar Jacoby observed a

[1] Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, "Human Rights and History," *Past & Present* 232, no. 1 (2016): 1; Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, "Introduction: Genealogies of Human Rights," in *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.

[2] For the human rights breakthrough in the 1970s, see Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Barbara J. Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn, eds., *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

[3] US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981–1988, Volume III, Soviet Union, January 1981–January 1983* (Washington, DC: US Government Publishing Office, 2016), Document 15.

"Reagan turnaround on human rights" in 1986.[4] While the administration had initially sought to downgrade the role of human rights concerns in US foreign policy, by 1986 it had incorporated these into its wider foreign policy agenda. In a speech to Congress in March 1986, Reagan declared, "We have sought to defend and advance the cause of democracy, freedom, and human rights throughout the world […] there can be no doubt where America stands. The American people believe in human rights and oppose tyranny in whatever form, whether of the left or the right."[5] While the administration's commitment to human rights was more selective and limited than this statement indicated, something its congressional critics were eager to point out, human rights concerns played a much more prominent role in US foreign policy by the mid-1980s than Reagan had initially envisioned.

This book traces the role of human rights concerns in US foreign policy during the 1980s, focusing on the struggle among the Reagan administration and members of Congress. Looking beyond the presidency to individual members of Congress holds the key to understanding "the Reagan turnaround." The book argues that pressure from members of Congress had the unintended consequence of initiating the administration's creation of a conservative human rights policy centered on democracy promotion and anti-communism. The administration's decision to proactively craft its own human rights policy had profound implications for American attention to human rights, as it changed the conversation from whether human rights concerns should inform US foreign policy to how they should. The book explores the vital ways in which relations between the executive and legislative branches of government shaped attention to human rights in US foreign policy and how the issue of human rights, in turn, impacted executive–legislative relations.

The book examines the varied motivations that led some members of Congress to champion human rights. At times, members of Congress shaped US human rights policy to a degree that was disproportionate to their formal influence on foreign policy. Political scientists Ralph G. Carter and James M. Scott use the term "foreign policy entrepreneurs" to describe members of Congress who set the political agenda and drive policymaking on foreign policy.[6] Given that most of the

[4] Tamar Jacoby, "The Reagan Turnaround on Human Rights," *Foreign Affairs* 64, no. 5 (1986): 1066–1086.
[5] Ronald Reagan, Message to the Congress on Freedom, Regional Security, and Global Peace, May 14, 1986. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, accessed August 7, 2019, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/258530.
[6] Ralph G. Carter and James M. Scott, *Choosing to Lead: Understanding Congressional Foreign Policy Entrepreneurs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 21.

535 members of Congress have little interest in, or knowledge about, foreign policy, motivated foreign policy entrepreneurs can have a disproportionate impact.[7] As this book shows, such members of Congress concerned with human rights issues were able to draw on information, expertise, and political capital from human rights NGOs and activists, who frequently turned to Congress in their attempt to influence US human rights policy. From this position, members of Congress pressured the administration to put a higher emphasis on protecting the civil and political rights of dissidents, human rights activists, and minorities in communist countries as well as in rightwing dictatorships.[8]

The book covers the period between the 1970s when human rights were elevated to the top of American politics, and the post–Cold War era, when human rights became a near-universally accepted norm in global politics. More specifically, due to its focus on executive–legislative relations, the book opens with the 1980 election and concludes with the end of the Reagan administration and the 100th Congress in January 1989. This period formed a tumultuous setting for American foreign policymakers.[9] On the global scene, the Cold War heated up significantly at the beginning of the decade, heightening the fear of nuclear war, before reaching its rapid and remarkably peaceful conclusion only a few years later. At home, a conservative movement, personified with Reagan's sweeping victory in 1980, arose to challenge the liberal consensus that had come under increasing pressure during the 1970s.[10] In an agenda that was later dubbed the "Reagan Revolution," the new president promised radical change, in the form of less government regulation,

[7] Rebecca K. C. Hersman, *Friends and Foes: How Congress and the President Really Make Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 10; Carter and Scott, *Choosing to Lead*; Burdett A. Loomis, *The Contemporary Congress* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), 121.

[8] Jacoby, "The Reagan Turnaround"; Joe Renouard, *Human Rights in American Foreign Policy: From the 1960s to the Soviet Collapse*, *Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 198–207; David P. Forsythe and David Beetham, "Human Rights and US Foreign Policy: Two Levels, Two Worlds," *Political Studies* 43, no. 4 (1995): 122–124.

[9] The 1980s were at the heart of the period that historian Daniel T. Rodgers has described as "the age of fracture." Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[10] Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, American liberalism experienced a crisis as American society underwent dramatic transformations. Before this crisis of liberalism, scholars such as Louis Hartz had claimed the existence of an underlying liberal consensus in America centered on Lockean ideals of equality, individual freedom, social mobility, and popular democracy. Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, 1955); Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

lower taxes, and a foreign policy of "peace through strength."[11] In the same election, Republicans won control over the Senate for the first time since 1955, in part due to the rise of a new conservative grassroots coalition known as the New Right.[12] The new political constellation led to an intense politicization of foreign policy, with repeated confrontations between the administration and especially liberal Democrats in the House. Outside of government, Americans increasingly organized on behalf of their favored causes, including a growing body of human rights NGOs, which increasingly turned their attention to Washington.[13]

Rising Cold War hostilities abroad and the politicization of foreign policy at home were critical determinants of human rights policy debates during the first half of the 1980s. Liberal and conservative conceptions of human rights and their appropriate role in US foreign policy clashed as Americans sought to determine how to respond to a changing international environment. The Reagan administration and its conservative allies defined human rights narrowly as civil and political rights and argued that the United States should focus on criticizing human rights violations in communist countries, while ignoring abuses by American allies.[14] Liberals, by contrast, continued to define human rights somewhat more broadly and advocated a human rights policy more evenly applied to allies as well as to adversaries.[15] Throughout the book, I classify policymakers as liberal, moderate, or conservative to describe where they belonged on this continuum of foreign policy worldviews. Unless otherwise specified, the classification does not refer to their

[11] For a discussion of the Reagan Revolution, see W. Elliot Brownlee, "Introduction: Revisiting the Reagan Revolution," in *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and Its Legacies*, ed. W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 1–13.

[12] Religious evangelical leaders of the New Right such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson gained large followings and used their influence to raise money to support conservative politicians, including Ronald Reagan. For more on the rise of the New Right, see Michael Schaller, *Right Turn: American Life in the Reagan–Bush Era, 1980–1992* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 27–48.

[13] According to James M. Lindsay, "The intense politicization of foreign policy during the Reagan years pushed people to organize on behalf of their favored causes." James M. Lindsay, *Congress and the Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 28.

[14] Reagan's conception drew on a neoconservative understanding of human rights promulgated by figures such as Senator Henry M. Jackson (D-WA) and Jeane Kirkpatrick during the 1970s, which saw human rights as a way to break with détente and restore American leadership in the world.

[15] Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue*, 221–225. For Republican human rights conceptions of the 1970s, see Carl J. Bon Tempo, "Human Rights and the U.S. Republican Party in the Late 1970s," in *The Breakthrough. Human Rights in the 1970s*, ed. Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 146–165.

positions on domestic policy. For members of Congress, the most used categories are liberal Democrats, conservative Republicans, and moderates from both parties. For officials in the administration, the two main categories are moderates and hardliners, with the latter consisting of a combination of Cold War warriors and neoconservatives.[16] All such classifications are constructs used for analytical purposes and do not necessarily reflect the self-identification of the individuals in question.

The contestation over the appropriate role of human rights in US foreign policy strengthened human rights as a language of morality but increased the uncertainty around what a human rights policy entailed. By incorporating human rights concerns into a doctrine aimed at rolling back communism through support for guerrilla groups and right-wing dictatorships, the Reagan administration underlined the concept's flexibility and ambiguity. Carter had adopted human rights as a language to restore America's moral standing in the world after the Vietnam War and had seen it as a way to break with the Cold War dichotomy of East–West contestation.[17] Reagan shared Carter's desire to rehabilitate the international image of the United States, but he employed human rights as an ideological weapon in an attempt to win the Cold War rather than to move beyond it. Shifting coalitions of members of Congress and NGOs challenged the administration's human rights policy, contributing to the increasingly ubiquitous presence of human rights in debates over US foreign policy. This contestation coincided with, and arguably contributed to, the continued institutionalization of human rights concerns into US foreign policy that had begun in the 1970s. In Congress, members of Congress strengthened existing institutions concerned with human rights and formed new ones. In the executive branch, the State Department's Human Rights Bureau underwent a substantial professionalization, and outside of government, human rights NGOs grew in strength and numbers. As a result, by the end of the decade, human rights concerns enjoyed a more firmly established presence in US foreign policy, even as they were as contested more vigorously than ever before.

Scholarship by diplomatic historians in recent years has expanded dramatically as human rights history has emerged as a thriving subfield within the discipline of history.[18] In the words of one the leading scholars

[16] The classifications of members of Congress are elaborated further in Chapter 1, while the categories for administration officials are explained in Chapter 2.
[17] David F. Schmitz and Vanessa Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights: The Development of a Post-Cold War Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 1 (2004): 113–143.
[18] Sarah B. Snyder, "Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Relations: A Historiographical Review," *Passport: The Newsletter of the SHAFR* 44 (2013): 16–21.

of human rights history, Samuel Moyn, "It [the history of human rights] came to professional attention from nowhere and extremely rapidly."[19] This book offers three new contributions. First, while the existing scholarship has focused mostly on the breakthroughs of human rights in the 1940s and the 1970s, this book addresses the less studied subject of what happened to human rights concerns in the 1980s after these breakthroughs. Historians of human rights in US foreign relations have been preoccupied with establishing the genesis of modern human rights with the 1940s and the 1970s as the two leading contenders. Arguing for the primacy of the 1940s, Elizabeth Borgwardt proposes that the international human rights pinned down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) were essentially an expanded version of the New Deal and Four Freedoms launched by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt.[20] Moyn, by contrast, argues that human rights emerged in the 1970s as a "last utopia" in the form of morality-based anti-politics, filling the void after the failure of the omnipotent revolutionary agendas of socialism and anti-colonialism.[21] Challenging both of these breakthroughs, Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann contends that it does not make sense to speak of human rights as a basic concept in global politics until the 1990s.[22] Recently, Robert Brier and others have urged historians to move beyond the search for a breakthrough, arguing instead that scholars ought to identify the multiple chronologies of postwar human rights history and a focus on the variety of human rights vernaculars.[23] This book, along with other recent publications, embodies this sentiment by tracing multiple conceptions of human rights in American foreign

[19] Samuel Moyn, "Substance, Scale, and Salience: The Recent Historiography of Human Rights," *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 8 (2012): 136. Moyn has professed that after having enjoyed an historiographical victory in recent years, human rights history might soon reach its end because both human rights and its history "become normal and undramatic." Samuel Moyn, "The End of Human Rights History," *Past & Present* 233, no. 1 (2016): 322.

[20] Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). See also Mary Ann Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House, 2001); Mark Mazower, "The Strange Triumph of Human Rights, 1933–1950," *Historical Journal* 47, no. 2 (2004): 379–398.

[21] Moyn, *Last Utopia*. See also Eckel and Moyn, eds., *The Breakthrough*; Daniel Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue*.

[22] Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, "Human Rights and History," *Past & Present* 232, no. 1 (2016), 20.

[23] Robert Brier, "Beyond the Quest for a "Breakthrough": Reflections on the Recent Historiography on Human Rights," *European History Yearbook* 16 (2015): 155–173. Moyn likewise warns that "the chronological dispute risks becoming a distraction." Moyn, "Substance, Scale, and Salience," 124.

relations in the 1980s. Taking advantage of the increasing availability of archival material from this decade, historians such as Sarah B. Snyder, Carl J. Bon Tempo, Gregory F. Domber, Christian Philip Peterson, and Joe Renouard have established a fast-growing body of scholarship.[24] Together with this scholarship, this book promises to bridge the extensive research on the 1970s, pioneered by Moyn, and the nascent research on the 1990s, called for by Hoffmann. As such, the book helps us to better understand the evolution of human rights concerns in American foreign relations from their cold war origins to our own time.

Second, while the majority of the existing scholarship has focused on presidents or grassroots movements, this book places individual members of Congress at the center of the narrative, uncovering their significant, but overlooked, contributions to the formation of US human rights policy. Whereas most foreign relations scholarship has focused on the executive branch, recent scholarship inspired by the transnational and cultural turns within diplomatic history has drawn attention to nongovernment actors at the grassroots level such as human rights NGOs, religious groups, and ethnic groups.[25] Still, a middle-layer of actors between presidents and

[24] Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network*, *Human Rights in History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Carl J. Bon Tempo, "From the Center-Right: Freedom House and Human Rights in the 1970s and 1980s," in *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History*, ed. Petra Goedde and William Hitchcock (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Gregory F. Domber, *Empowering Revolution: America, Poland, and the End of the Cold War*, *The New Cold War History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Christian Philip Peterson, *Globalizing Human Rights: Private Citizens, the Soviet Union, and the West*, *Routledge Studies on History and Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Renouard, *Human Rights in American Foreign Policy*. See also the forthcoming book Lauren F. Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations: Evangelicals, Human Rights, and U.S. Foreign Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, in press).

[25] Thomas W. Zeiler, "The Diplomatic History Bandwagon: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 95, no. 4 (2009): 1053–1573. For examples of scholarship on human rights at the grassroots level, see Sarah B. Snyder, *From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Lauren F. Turek, "To Support a 'Brother in Christ': Evangelical Groups and U.S.–Guatemalan Relations during the Ríos Montt Regime," *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 4 (2015): 689–719; Peter Slezkine, "From Helsinki to Human Rights Watch: How an American Cold War Monitoring Group Became an International Human Rights Institution," *Humanity* 5, no. 3 (2014): 345–370; Barbara J. Keys, "Anti-Torture Politics: Amnesty International, the Greek Junta, and the Origins of the Human Rights 'Boom' in the United States," in *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History*, ed. Akira Iriye, Petra Goedde, and William I. Hitchcock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 201–221; Jan Eckel, "The International League for the Rights of Man, Amnesty International, and the Changing Fate of Human Rights Activism from the 1940s through the 1970s," *Humanity* 4, no. 2 (2013): 183–214; Bon Tempo, "From the Center-Right."

grassroots movements, such as members of Congress and career diplomats, remains largely unexamined by historians of American foreign relations concerned with human rights, especially in the 1980s.[26]

Third, this book contributes a new interpretation of the development in the Reagan administration's approach to human rights. Since journalist Tamar Jacoby first pointed to a "Reagan turnaround on human rights" in 1986, scholarly assessments have stressed different factors for this and identified different moments for its occurrence.[27] Beth Fischer argues that the turnaround took place in early 1984, when Reagan softened his approach to the Soviet Union due to heightened fears of nuclear war.[28] Others locate the turnaround during Reagan's second term and explain the change with changes in the foreign policy team as well as Reagan's strengthened position following his reelection and the establishment of a stronger defense posture.[29] Members of Congress are only afforded limited attention in this scholarship. The most notable exception to this is Sarah Snyder, who argues that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's rejection of Ernest Lefever to head the Human Rights Bureau led the administration to reevaluate its approach to human rights as early as 1981.[30] Building on Snyder's work, this book argues that the administration gradually changed its approach to human rights during 1981. It demonstrates that the seeds for a more assertive human rights policy were present in internal debates in the National Security Council (NSC) as early as February 1981. Finally, it traces how individual members of Congress continued to influence the administration's approach to human rights issues throughout the 1980s.

[26] William Michael Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere: Human Rights and US Cold War Policy toward Argentina* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 5. The main exceptions are two articles by Barbara J. Keys and Sarah B. Snyder that examines how members of Congress introduced human rights concerns into US foreign policy through hearings and legislation in the 1970s, forcing a reluctant executive branch to employ human rights language. Barbara J. Keys, "Congress, Kissinger, and the Origins of Human Rights Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 5 (2010): 823–851; Sarah B. Snyder, "'A Call for U.S. Leadership': Congressional Activism on Human Rights," *Diplomatic History* 37, no. 2 (2013): 372–397, as well as two book chapters by Snyder on the 1980s: Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War*, 38–52, on the US Helsinki Commission; and Sarah B. Snyder, "The Defeat of Ernest Lefever's Nomination: Keeping Human Rights on the United States Foreign Policy Agenda," in *Challenging U.S. Foreign Policy: America and the World*, ed. Bevan Sewell and Scott Lucas (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 136–161.

[27] Jacoby, "The Reagan Turnaround."

[28] Beth A. Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 147–148.

[29] Renouard, *Human Rights in American Foreign Policy*, 198–199. For the latter in relations to Latin America, see Kathryn Sikkink, *Mixed Signals: U.S. Human Rights Policy and Latin America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 149.

[30] Snyder, "The Defeat of Ernest Lefever's Nomination," 151–152.

Historians have offered a variety of explanations for why Americans began to care about the human rights of people in foreign countries. They have pointed to how the growing human rights consciousness during the 1970s, and one argues in the 1960s, was driven by large transformations abroad and at home. These transformations included decolonization, dissatisfaction with the Vietnam War and US support for anti-communist dictators, the civil rights movement, the rise of human rights NGOs, and increasing interdependence across borders as a result of new technologies.[31] Several of these developments continued to influence American attention to human rights into the 1980s as the salience of human rights reached unprecedented heights in debates over US foreign policy.[32] Moreover, Americans embraced human rights for various ideological, religious, and moral reasons. Often the key motivation was deeply personal brought about by a moving encounter with a victim or a strong identification caused by the person's own lived experience.

Why members of Congress, with busy schedules dominated by constituent concerns and reelection, would devote time to the human rights of people in far-off lands who could not vote for them or make campaign contributions poses an additional puzzle. After all, political scientists in the tradition of rational choice argue that members of Congress are single-minded seekers of reelection and, as a result, we should expect them to devote their time to this objective.[33] Members of Congress are also driven by their desire for power and a wish to do good public policy.[34] Although human rights issues do not appear to fall into either of these categories, a closer look suggests that they can. In some cases, championing a human rights issue could offer political gains with potential electoral rewards if constituents cared sufficiently about the issue. This occurred, in particular, when ethnic and religious groups in home districts mobilized on specific human rights issues.[35] Moreover, some members of Congress had relatively safe seats that allowed them to

[31] Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue*, 3–14; Snyder, *From Selma to Moscow*, 3–6; Mark Philip Bradley, *The World Reimagined: Americans and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 6–10.

[32] For the importance of the telephone for human rights activism in the 1980s, see Barbara J. Keys, "The Telephone and Its Uses in 1980s U.S. Activism," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 48, no. 4 (2018): 485–509.

[33] David R. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).

[34] Richard F. Fenno, *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1978).

[35] Tony Smith, *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012).

dedicate significant attention to their policy interests without concern about reelection. Championing human rights also offered some members of Congress increased political visibility that could translate into both political gains and power.[36] Raising the banner of human rights allowed members to cast themselves as moral leaders in ways that could help them further their political ambitions. In addition, human rights issues offered members interested in foreign affairs a path to shape US foreign policy because Congress had legislated itself into a prominent position on human rights since the mid-1970s. Importantly, several members of Congress genuinely believed the promotion of human rights fell into the category of good public policy. For them, promoting human rights was both morally right and in America's best interest.

Several additional factors shaped how and why members of Congress embraced human rights concerns in general and in specific cases. Just as for ordinary Americans, ideological, religious, and moral reasons informed their positions on human rights issues and often personal experiences was an important catalyst. Moreover, members of Congress had to contend with partisanship, institutional affiliation, and public opinion, which could lead them to both elevate and downplay human rights concerns. Most of the members of Congress and other policymakers in this book displayed a combination of motivations. This mixture of motivations, and the difficulty of proving their relative importance, makes it difficult to assess the sincerity of human rights activism. A comparison of the case studies reveals a considerable inconsistency in the commitment to human rights from both the Reagan administration and most members of Congress. For most policymakers, human rights essentially constituted a political language that could be invoked to further specific causes when expedient. Nevertheless, some policymakers were committed to human rights almost across the board. Sometimes opposing sides would both claim to advance the cause of human rights thanks to the flexibility and vagueness of human rights language as well as the complexity of some of the issues.

The book combines chapters on the Reagan administration and the Congressional Human Rights Caucus (CHRC), a new human rights institution created in 1983, with case studies of US policy toward Soviet Jewry, South Africa, and Nicaragua. This structure makes it possible to examine new approaches to human rights in the 1980s in both the executive and legislative branches of government while also analyzing in-depth how members of Congress and the administration contested the

[36] David P. Forsythe, *Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy: Congress Reconsidered* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1988), 145.