

Robert F. Kennedy's Human Rights Vision for America: Forty Years on From the Day of Affirmation Speech

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I. Introduction:

More than 35 years have passed since that awful day in Los Angeles – 6th of June 1968 -- when Senator Robert F. Kennedy's ("RFK") life was tragically cut short by an assassin's bullet. While RFK's role in the domestic civil rights movement in the United States ("US") has been studied extensively, little attention has been paid to defining RFK's international human rights vision. Exactly two years before his death, 6th of June 1966, RFK set forth this vision in a speech in Cape Town, South Africa, at the Meeting of the National Union of South African Students ("NUSAS") (the "Day of Affirmation Address"). The Day of Affirmation Address - - generally acknowledged by RFK scholars to be his finest speech - - sets forth his understanding of the role America has to play in respect to the emergence of the human rights norm.

RFK believed that America had a special role in promoting international human rights, social justice and the growth of freedom throughout the world. Ironically, this expansive belief is shared by none other than President Bush himself. Yet, while these two men speak of similar values – a Wilsonian approach to American foreign policy – there are significant differences to be

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explored herein. For instance, the Bush Administration points with pride to the fact that since September 11th, millions of persons living in Afghanistan have now been ‘liberated’ and are enjoying their first taste of freedom and democracy.² Yet, RFK saw democracy as incapable of flourishing apart from social justice and economic progress for those least fortunate in society. Thus, RFK might view with scepticism the success claimed in Afghanistan to date by the Bush Administration. RFK would point to the fact that, since the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan is now more dependent than ever before upon the cash generated by the cultivation of the poppy crop that ends up in the streets of Amsterdam and New York as heroin. For RFK, a society so dependent upon profiting from the human degradation of drug trafficking cannot in any true sense of the word be said to be free or just: “he who would enslave others ends only chaining himself, for chains have two ends, and he who holds the chain is as securely bound as he whom it holds.”³

The task for America to live up to RFK’s human rights vision is an enigmatic and daunting one. In weighing RFK’s words -- spoken late in his life -- against his own deeds in the Kennedy Administration (a subject beyond the scope of this paper), we see evidence of the moral ambiguity that characterises US’ human rights policy both during and after the Cold War period. It is a tough balancing act to advocate the growth of human rights, social justice and freedom internationally, on the one hand, while operating in a world so aptly characterised by the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan as a “dangerous place”, on the other hand. All too often, America finds itself supporting regimes that are neither democratic nor respectful of fundamental human rights⁴, with disastrous consequences. Finally, it is the belief of the authors that a look at the words of RFK might offer the US some guidance out of the Guantanamo-Abu Gharaib morass it is currently enmeshed in today.⁵

² Tragically, the same cannot truly be said of Iraq. As of August 2005, the insurgency grows ever stronger, a national constitution remains to be completed, ethnic strife continues to thrive and civil society has yet to be fully taking root.

³ RFK quoted in Paul Fusco, ‘RFK Funeral Train’, Magnum Photos Inc., 2000, unnumbered page.

⁴ This is not always the case however. The Government of Uzbekistan has asked the US to remove its military base operating near the border in Afghanistan, in part, as a response to the US State Department condemnation of the way Uzbekistan troops suppressed dissent in Andijan. Human Rights Watch alleges that hundreds of unarmed civilians were killed in this city on 13 May 2005. See <http://hrw.org/campaigns/uzbekistan/andijan/>.

⁵ For more on the never-ending controversy engendered by the US treatment of detainees at Guantanamo, see http://www.hrw.org/doc/?t=usa_gitmo.

II. The Context of the Day of Affirmation Address:

The Day of Affirmation Address draws on a number of factors to be considered RFK finest speech. Evan Thomas in his masterful work, *Robert Kennedy His Life*, sets forth the context in which the speech was made:

Nowhere was injustice more stark or the prospect for change bleaker than in South Africa in 1966. The country's white ruling class had stripped the blacks of freedoms and a chance to earn a decent living. Protest from the First World was muted; the United States government, like others in the West, regarded South Africa as an outpost against communism, which seemed to be gaining ground in the early and middle '60s. The reform movement within Africa was tiny and frightened. Margaret Marshall, a young student activist in South Africa at the time, recalled the loneliness:

South Africa was in its most mean, oppressive period. It was a nasty time. There was real fear – the first reports of torture. The world seemed to ignore us. We invited [UN Secretaries General] Dag Hammarskjöld and U Thant. No one came. Visitors who did would say, "I didn't realize it was so complicated." But Bobby Kennedy was different...⁶

The speech itself was the product of an interesting set of challenges identified by Thomas:

[RFK] has second thoughts. What if the South African regime used his appearance as an excuse to crack down harder? By indulging his own need to prove his courage and defiance [by speaking in South Africa]; would he be putting others at risk? Kennedy's disquiet was played

⁶ Evan Thomas, 'Robert Kennedy His Life', Touchstone Press, New York, 2000, p. 321.

out during the drafting of the Day of Affirmation speech. He would tone down [speechwriter] Adam Walinsky's heated prose, only to have his aide try to slip fiery words back in. When Kennedy finally blew up, [Kennedy aide] Joe Dolan suggested that he get rid of Walinsky rather than struggle with him. "Oh, Sorensen was worse," Kennedy sighed, thinking of his brother's talented wordsmith who could be prickly, too, about defending his prose. Walinsky was not fired, but was layered: Richard Goodwin was brought in to help craft the speech – which would be remember as Kennedy's best.⁷

Thomas goes on to describe the actual event:

In the biting cold of a South African winter's day, a crowd of about 15,000 surged around the auditorium at the University of Cape Town. Loudspeakers were placed outside to relay the speech, but South African security forces cut the wires. An empty chair was left for the banned [NUSAS leader] Robertson. Kennedy's eyes were glistening with tears as he rose to speak. On this Day of Affirmation, he spoke of personal freedom and the "sacred rights of Western Society" that separated "us and Nazi Germany...Athens and Persia." He warned against "the danger of futility: the belief there is nothing one man or one woman can do against the enormous array of the world's ills". Steadying his quavery voice, he declared that many of many of the world's great movements began with the work of a single man. "Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation....

It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a

⁷ Id., p. 321.

man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance...

When [RFK] had finished, there was a silence. Like a child, [Margaret] Marshall recalled, he looked around him, “as if to say, was the speech okay?” Then, with a rush, a roar of applause crashed over him. Marshall could see that he was immediately relieved, “high and exhilarated.”⁸

As soon as RFK left South Africa, Thomas points out that he began “worrying about the people he had left behind. He needn’t have. In just a few days, he had given heart to the struggling anti-apartheid movement.”⁹ Thomas quotes Margaret Marshall’s recollections:

He reminded us...that we were not alone. That we were part of a great and noble tradition, the re-affirmation of nobility in every human person. We all had felt alienated. It felt to me that what I was doing was small and meaningless. He put us back into the great sweep of history. Even if it’s just a tiny thing, it will add up. He reset the moral compass, not so much by attacking apartheid, but by simply talking about justice and freedom and dignity – words that none of us had heard in, it seems like, an eternity. He didn’t go through the white liberals, he connected straight – by standing on a car. Nobody had done that. How simple it was! He was not afraid.¹⁰

III. RFK’s Human Rights Vision:

⁸ Ibid, p. 322.

⁹ Ibid, p. 323.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 323.

In the Day of Affirmation speech, RFK identifies the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as at the very core of human existence. These principles for RFK “embody the collective hopes of men of good will all around the world.”¹¹ RFK goes on to indicate that “at the heart of ...western freedom and democracy is the belief that the individual man, the child of God, is the touchstone of value, and all society, groups, the state, exist for his benefit.”¹² It is this enlargement of liberty for individual human beings that must be ultimate human rights goal of any nation. Thus, the concept of individual liberty lies at the core of RFK’s human rights ideology. Within individual liberty, a society cannot be just nor said to be free.

RFK outlines the elements of individual liberty, First and foremost for RFK is the freedom of speech: “the right to express and communicate ideas; to set oneself apart from the dumb beasts of field and forest; to recall governments to the duties and obligations.”¹³ Allied with the concept of the freedom of speech, is the right of the individual to participate in society and “to affirm one’s membership and allegiance to the body politic.”¹⁴ Participation in the body politic requires that individuals have the power to be heard: “to share in the decisions of government which shapes men’s lives.”¹⁵ The right to family, work, education, a place to raise one’s children and a place to live all depend on the decisions of government – “all can be swept away by a government that does not heed the demands of its people.”¹⁶

RFK identifies the essential humanity of man as the primary virtue that governments must protect. This protection can only be had “where government must answer – not just to the wealthy; not just to those of a particular religion, or a particular race; but to all its people.”¹⁷ Certain sacred rights of western society exist that limit the power of every government to act against its own people: no interference with the right to worship; the security of the home; no arbitrary imposition of pains or penalties by officials high or low; no restriction of the freedom of men or women to seek

¹¹ Transcript of Address of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Day of Affirmation, University of Cape Town, June 6, 1966. Press Office of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, 6/6/66, copied viewed at John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Reference Desk, 15/10/04, Boston, Massachusetts.

¹² Ibid., p.1.

¹³ Ibid., p.1.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.1.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.1.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.1.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

education or work or opportunity of any kind.¹⁸ In essence, governments may not interfere or prevent an individual from achieving what he or she is capable of becoming by virtue of his or her hard work and God given gifts.

RFK identifies communism -- the scourge of his age -- as the very opposite of the freedom western society holds dear. In communism, the state is exalted over the individual and the family.¹⁹ All lack in freedom of speech, protest, religion and press.²⁰ Yet, in his well-noted opposition to communism, RFK urges free societies to not imitate communism's dictatorship but to enlarge individual human freedom -- in the US and abroad.²¹ RFK spoke of the need to avoid labelling as "communist" every threat to the privileged classes of a society.²² "But as I have seen on my travels in all sections of the world, reform is not communism. And denial of freedom, in whatever name, only strengthens the very communism its claims to oppose."²³ Can this observation on the part of RFK be of any value to the architects of the war against terror today?

RFK also spoke in harsh terms of the gap between the rhetoric and reality that so characterised the treatment of the races in the America of his day and age. "Many nations have set forth their own definitions and declarations of [human rights] these principles. And there have often been wide and tragic gaps between promise and performance, ideal and reality."²⁴ RFK spoke of the discrimination his father felt as a poor Irish-American lad growing-up in "turn of the century" Boston. RFK saw the denial of opportunity to persons of different nationality, social class or race in the US as a loss to humanity as a whole: "How many sons of Italian or Jewish or Polish parents slumbered in slums -- untaught, unlearned, their potential lost forever to the nation and the human race? Even today, what price will we pay before we have assured full opportunity to millions of Negro Americans?"²⁵

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 2

¹⁹ Ibid., p.2.

²⁰ Ibid., p.2.

²¹ Ibid. p. 2.

²² Ibid, p.2.

²³ Ibid, p.2.

²⁴ Ibid., p.2.

²⁵ Ibid., p.2.

While admittedly great progress has been made in the US over the past forty-years to afford equal opportunity to African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans, what would RFK make of the soul of a country in which during the last national election voters in 11 states enacted laws to explicitly deny same-sex couples any legal status whatsoever? Ironically, how does this action by the majority to deny civil rights to a small minority reconcile with RFK's own rhetoric: "We in the United States believe in the protection of minorities; we recognize the contributions they can make and the leadership they can provide; and we do not believe that any people – whether minority, majority or individual human beings – are "expendable" in the cause of theory or policy."²⁶

Given this last statement and the resulting death toll to civilians in any war, would RFK approve of the use of military force to liberate Iraq? The answer can never be known. However, if one were to look at portions of the Day of Affirmation Address, one can see that RFK saw that progress towards equality of freedom for the human race must only be achieved through peaceful and non-violent change. "So the road toward equality of freedom is not easy and great cost and danger march alongside us. We are committed to peaceful and non-violent change and that is important for all to understand – though all change is unsettling."²⁷ The concept of the use of non-violent means to achieve social change is closely tied in with RFK's concept of the full human equality of all people.²⁸ Simply put, one human life is not expendable to achieve a goal no matter how noble or lofty the principle may be.

Similarly, RFK may not have thought that the "neocon" concept of making the Middle East a garden of US-style democracy appropriate. "Nations, like men, often march to the beat of different drummers, and the precise solutions of the United States can neither be dictated nor transplanted to others. What is important is that all nations must march toward increasing freedom; toward justice for all; toward a society strong and flexible enough to meet the demands of all of its own people, and a world of immense and dizzying change."²⁹

²⁶ Ibid., p.3.

²⁷ Ibid., p.3.

²⁸ Ibid, p.3.

²⁹ Ibid., p.3.

While some of RFK's own words indicate that the US might not be well-advised to let its troops go around the world "nation building", at the same time, RFK had little patience for those that exploit tribal differences for their own political gain, e.g., Moslem/Christian; Hutu/Tutsi; Hindu/Moslem; Sunni/Shiite; Catholic/Protestant; etc. "Everywhere new technology and communications bring men and nations closer together, the concerns of one inevitably become the concerns of all. And our new closeness is stripping away the false masks, the illusions of difference which is at the root of injustice and hate and war. Only earthbound man still clings to the dark and poisoning superstition that his world is bounded by the nearest hill, his universe ended at river shore, his common humanity enclosed in the tight circle of those who share his town and views and colour of his skin."³⁰

RFK in his vision for humanity placed greatest responsibility on young people of all countries to do their best to move humanity forward. RFK called on the youth of the 1960s to work hard to build a world as follows: "It would be a world of independent nations, moving toward international community, each of which protected and respected basic human freedoms. It would be a world that demanded of each government that it accept its responsibility to insure social justice. It would be a world of constantly accelerating economic progress – not material welfare as an end in itself, but as a means to liberate the capacity of each human being to pursue his talents and his hopes."³¹ Maybe RFK might view the success of the European Union over the past half-century as a good example of where people put aside age-old hatreds to live and work with each other in peace.

Finally, RFK clearly thought that progress towards universal human rights requires individual action as well. RFK was profoundly affected by existentialist thinking such as that found in the writings of Camus. Applying Camus' concepts of man as an active being, RFK cautioned young human rights activists (and perhaps Americans disgusted with the outcome of last week's election) not to accept futility – "the belief that there is nothing one man or woman can do against the enormous array of the world's ills --- against misery and ignorance, injustice and violence."³² Participation in groups like the Peace Corps, working

³⁰ Ibid., p.3.

³¹ Ibid., p.3.

³² Ibid. p. 5.

in communities for social change, etc. are all small steps that when taken together have the net effect of producing great social change. One need only think of how communism in Eastern Europe collapsed to appreciate the prescient nature of RFK's observations in 1966.

IV Current US Human Rights Policy.

The vision laid forth on the so-called 'Day of Affirmation' was truly inspirational. It stripped away the divisions that had plagued mankind throughout history and identified the realisation of the "liberty for individual human beings..."³³ as being "the supreme goal...of any western society."³⁴ Revolutionary as it was, the vision of RFK was also realistic. The late senator understood that the divisions between mankind had deep historical roots. In doing so he appreciated that although in reality it would take time for these divisions to be overcome, what was essential was for all nations to "march toward increasing freedom."³⁵

Like RFK, President George W Bush openly recognises that the US has a "responsibility to lead"³⁶ in this march. Nevertheless, forty years on from the Day of Affirmation Address, has the US utilised its "position of unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence"³⁷ to assist this march? The answer to this stems from a detailed study of the current US policy on human rights.

Upon completion of such a study we become aware that some, but not all, of the essential elements to RFK's vision have permeated the policies of the current Bush Administration. In view of this, the authors will now consider how the current US policy on human rights has both assisted and thwarted the realisation of RFK's "supreme goal."

Assists the march

³³. Ibid., p. 1.

³⁴. Ibid, p. 1.

³⁵. Ibid, p. 3.

³⁶. Bush, G.W: The National Security Strategy of The United States of America: September 2002, Forenote, available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nssall.html>

³⁷. Ibid

Looking initially at the *2002 US National Security Strategy*³⁸ it is clear that the current administration places great emphasis on the promotion of liberty as a means of securing peace, prosperity and security at both a domestic and international level. Like RFK, President Bush identifies freedom as being “the non-negotiable demand of human dignity; the birthright of every person – in every civilization.”³⁹ Many are, however, understandably cautious of such rhetoric. As DP Forsythe correctly states:

‘[s]ince the Nixon – Kissinger era, and goaded by Congress, every US President has rhetorically endorsed human rights as part of its foreign policy agenda.’⁴⁰

Indeed it is clear from the Clinton Administration’s inaction in curbing the human rights atrocities in the African state of Rwanda in 1994, that there can be a huge discrepancy between rhetoric and reality. However, in credit to President Bush, his Administration has sought to engage in the world to ensure the global realisation of human rights and the “supreme goal”. As then Secretary Colin Powell stated,

“President Bush’s strategy...demands that we play a role in helping to solve regional conflicts that we not just sit back behind our oceans and not take note of problems that are out there that we can play a leadership role in solving.”⁴¹

Such a strategy undoubtedly conforms to RFK’s vision. It places the freedom of the individual at the heart of its policy, and envisages action only where this ultimate aim is threatened. Thus as controversial as it may be, the Administration’s decision to use military force in Iraq has clearly been stressed as “only part of the solution.”⁴² They have committed themselves to the reconstruction

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Forsythe, D.P, “Human Rights and US Foreign Policy: Two Levels, Two Worlds” in Beetham, D (ed)., “Politics and Human rights”, Blackwell Publishers, 1995, p. 112.

⁴¹ Remarks of US Secretary of State Colin L Powell at The Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University, September 5th 2003, p. 3 available at:

<http://www.gwu.edu/~elliott/news/briefing/fall2003/p1.cfm>.

⁴² Ibid, p. 4.

of Iraq understanding that it is this that leaves “a lasting peaceful situation.”⁴³

It is during this reconstruction that we see the current policy on human rights committing itself to ensuring “membership and allegiance to the body politic,”⁴⁴ and thus one of the essential elements of “the supreme goal.”⁴⁵ This commitment is evident from their promotion of democratic elections in both Afghanistan and Iraq. As President Bush stated, the efforts of the current administration in Afghanistan has spawned the “spread of liberty”⁴⁶ in that some “[t]en million citizens have registered to vote”⁴⁷ in the Afghan elections and that “[f]orty one percent of those ten million are women.”⁴⁸

Such statistics all go to support the assumption that the current US policy on human rights has been permeated by the inspirational words of RFK. There is undoubtedly a deep concern throughout its policies and for the freedom of the individual, and it is this concern that has led to their pro-active efforts to secure individual liberty around the world. And this world, in the eyes of the Bush Administration, is not merely confined to the Middle East and Afghanistan.

In Sudan for instance, where it is estimated that more than 1.5 million people have died in the civil war between Sudan's Islamic and Arabic north and the Christian and Animist south,⁴⁹ the current Administration used its diplomatic influence to great humanitarian effect. Instead of ignoring the tragedies in Sudan the current Administration has recognised that “there are people in Darfur who desperately need the help of the international community.”⁵⁰ To this end, and in the words Secretary Powell:

The United States exerted strong leadership to focus international attention on this unfolding tragedy. We first took the issue of Sudan to the United Nations Security Council last fall.

⁴³. Ibid, p. 4.

⁴⁴. Kennedy, op cit., n.11, at p. 1.

⁴⁵. Ibid.

⁴⁶. Transcript of First Presidential Debate published in the *Sun-Sentinel*, October 1 2004.

⁴⁷. Ibid

⁴⁸. Ibid

⁴⁹. Estimate provided at: English People's Daily available online at: english.people.com.cn/

⁵⁰. Powell, op cit., n. 41.

President Bush was the first head of state to condemn publicly the Government of Sudan and to urge the international community to intensify efforts to end the violence. In April of this year, the United States brokered a ceasefire between the Government of Sudan and the rebels, and then took the lead to get the African Union to monitor that ceasefire.”⁵¹

It is thus clear that the US has assisted in the “march toward freedom” throughout the globe. There efforts in Sudan have seen them actively seek to strip away those historical divisions that have caused so much pain and suffering, and diplomatically establish agreements that go to secure the liberty for all the Sudanese.

Thwarts the march

Despite these undoubted steps towards securing RFK’s vision, it would be wholly unrealistic to say that the day of affirmation had finally been realised in US human rights policy. Thus despite making huge strides “...toward increasing freedom”⁵² the historical discrepancy between human rights rhetoric and reality still remain at both a national and international level.

Internationally we need only to look at the lack of action by the US in securing the liberty of North Korean citizens, who as UN Envoy John Bolton acknowledged were “starving”⁵³, to realise that this discrepancy remains. Indeed, despite acknowledging that the right to liberty, prosperity and peace are “the heritage of all peoples, and not just the exclusive privilege of a few”⁵⁴, the administration continues to fail in its self proclaimed leadership role by failing those who continue to suffer away from the media’s glare.

At a domestic level the “march toward increasing freedom,” although guided by “the principles enshrined in the Declaration of Independence,”⁵⁵ has been thwarted by the continued failure by the

⁵¹. Ibid.

⁵². Sun-Sentinel, op cit., p. 3.

⁵³. See n. 60.

⁵⁴. Powell, op cit., n. 36., p.2.

⁵⁵. Bush, G.W, op cit., n. 36 at p. 3.

Bush Administration to “overcome the self imposed handicap of prejudice.”⁵⁶ The aim of securing the “supreme goal” of liberty is undoubtedly challenged by the refusal to grant legal status to same sex couples within the US. Such a refusal not only challenges the realisation of the “supreme goal” of liberty for all, but contradicts the supposed stance of the Bush Administration. This contradiction is clear when we consider the notion by President Bush that:

In the twenty-first century, only nations that share a commitment to protecting basic human rights and guaranteeing political and economic freedom will be able to unleash the potential of their people and assure their future prosperity.⁵⁷

How long, therefore, will the US continue to self impose a handicap on its potential prosperity by restricting the liberties of its citizens? The Bush Administration, like so many before them, has seemingly forgotten that ‘a society is free only to the extent that its least privileged and its least tolerated members are free...’⁵⁸

This continued inaction at both a domestic and international level is not, however, the only means by which the current US policy on human rights has undermined RFK’s vision. RFK’s inspirational vision is similarly undermined by the current Administration’s failure to realize positive change through “peaceful and non violent”⁵⁹ means. Thus the previous reliance on “passive measures”⁶⁰ -- seen by then Secretary Colin Powell as sufficient to deal with the recent genocide in Sudan⁶¹ -- have been abandoned in Iraq for a more aggressive “path of action”.⁶² Such an approach has in many ways thwarted the realisation of RFK’s vision. Not only does it generate suspicion of the true motives that guide American involvement worldwide, e.g., military engagement in oil-rich Iraq, yet, little more than condemnation and sanctions

⁵⁶. Kennedy, op cit., n. 11 at p. 2.

⁵⁷. Bush, G.W, op cit., n. 36, p. 2.

⁵⁸. Bay, C: The Structure of Freedom: in Green, P (ed) Key Concepts in Critical Theory, Democracy: Humanity Books: 1999

⁵⁹. Kennedy, op cit, n. 11 at p. 3.

⁶⁰. Remarks of Undersecretary of State, John W, Bolton, ‘Beyond the Axis of Evil’, May 6, 2002 available at: <http://www.state.gov/t/us/rm/9962.htm>

⁶¹. Colin Powell: The Crisis in Darfur: Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: 9/9/2004 available at:

<http://canberra.usembassy.gov/hyper/2004/0805/epf403.htm>

⁶². Bush, G.W, op cit., n. 36, Forenote.

for Mugabe in Zimbabwe. Indeed, for many, the discrepancies that exist in the Bush Administration's differing levels of involvement in securing freedom abroad, the so called "heritage of all people"⁶³, have led many to believe that economic interests of the US guides policy in human rights matters.

Finally the authors contend that the US policy on human rights has failed to assist in the "march toward freedom"⁶⁴ by neglecting to heed the warning by RFK that "...the precise solutions of the United States can neither be dictated nor transplanted to others."⁶⁵ Instead so-called "American exceptionalism"⁶⁶ can be seen to have permeated US foreign policy. As Forsythe again observes, there is a

tendency for Americans to view their nation as 'a city on a hill' and their history as a moral lesson to the world.⁶⁷

Such an observation is not, however, unfounded. As Richard N Haass, the Director of Policy Planning Staff, identifies:

In the 21st century, the principal aim of American foreign policy is to integrate other countries and organisations into arrangements that will sustain a world consistent with U.S interests and values...⁶⁸

Such a world is however false. We live in an exceptionally diverse world where interests undoubtedly differ. To refuse to acknowledge and work alongside these diversities, the current US policy on human rights merely creates deeper suspicion and further resentment. We must not forget that the "supreme goal" looks to further the interests of the individual. It is they who should guide US foreign policy, because to unlock the potential of these individuals by securing their freedom, would go to secure other vital interests. As RFK stated, a world where the liberty of

⁶³. Colin L Powell, op cit., n. 41.

⁶⁴. Kennedy, op cit., n. 11 at p. 3.

⁶⁵. Ibid. p. 3.

⁶⁶. Forsythe, op cit., n. 40, at p. 111.

⁶⁷. Ibid., p. 112.

⁶⁸. Remarks of Richard Haass, "Defining U.S Foreign Policy in a Post-Post Cold War World", April 22nd 2002, available at <http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/uscn/state/2002/042201.htm>.

man is secured would create “a world of constantly accelerating economic progress.”⁶⁹

Overview

From this section it is clear that there is a long way to go if “the supreme goal” of individual liberty is to be realised. Nevertheless, it would be far too easy to pick apart policy decisions without holistically considering the positive affects that they could eventually spawn. Thus the strides that the Bush Administration has taken in assisting in the “march toward freedom” should not be underestimated. It, like it predecessor Administrations, has used its limited time in office to establish policies that actively seek to use US global influence to promote international human rights recognition. It is these polices that should be commended as they not only recognise the link between international and domestic security through the promotion of liberty, but represent a political risk.

Yet, it is in the use of force to liberate Iraq where RFK and the Bush Administration part ways. RFK spoke that day in Africa in 1966 of the need to use non-violence to end injustice in the world. Given this, can the loss of life produced by the invasion of Iraq and the resulting insurgency ever be justified? This is a troubling question for which no easy answer may be had. Towards the end of his life, RFK said the answer was “no” in the case of the US involvement in Vietnam. However, RFK did not arrive at this conclusion until late in the day when it was evident to just about everyone that the human cost of Vietnam could never justify the political outcome sought to be achieved. In this regard, President Bush may, if the situation in Iraq continues to unravel, find some comfort in the unlikely countenance of the spirit of RFK.

⁶⁹. Kennedy, op cit., n. 11, at p. 4.