

## **Bookshelf: Throwing Down the Neoconservative Gauntlet**

**Author:** By Tim W. Ferguson

### **Abstract:**

In his detailed evaluation of the Carter rights stance, Mr. Muravchik accuses the former president and his aides of timidity toward the Soviet Union, favoritism toward China, undue focus on Latin America and southern Africa, and improper distinctions that produced tougher sanctions on the periodic torturer than against the systematic dehumanizer. And, he concludes, the policies showed no net gains.

Mr. Muravchik traces the origin of the human-rights crusade, which has outlived Mr. Carter's term, to public concern for Soviet dissidents focused by the staff of the late Sen. Henry Jackson, on which the author served. Shortly after the 1976 campaign, such concern led the righteous new president to send a letter to Andrei Sakharov and meet the newly freed Vladimir Bukovsky at the White House, weeks before his State Department team had formulated its human-rights policy.

Taking its cue from public-opinion polls, the Carter administration made "human rights" a central tenet of its foreign policy, but shunted aside the Henry Jackson element. Instead, a number of McGovernites from Capitol Hill staffs were appointed to look after human rights. For most of them, Mr. Muravchik finds, rights violations reflected American immorality in the choice of anti-communist allies. One of their favorite techniques, and one the author particularly attacks, was to curtail aid programs "so as to improve the prospects for victory by the forces of liberation."

### **Full text:**

At age 38, Joshua Muravchik may be the most cogent and careful of the neoconservative writers on foreign policy.

His book on the Carter administration's human-rights policy, "The Uncertain Crusade" (Hamilton, 247 pages, \$18.95), turns out to be more than just supporting evidence for the familiar neoconservative stance of Carter critic Jeane Kirkpatrick, who wrote its foreword. It is a manifesto for world-wide intervention by the U.S. in areas not directly related to the security of this nation, and it should help to sharpen the lines of disagreement between the author's camp and the traditionalists and current "realists" on the right.

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The U.S.S.R. reacted with great bluster and, Mr. Muravchik concludes, Mr. Carter retreated into relative silence on matters Soviet as a result. Moscow had its way because the West gave (and still gives) top priority to arms-control negotiations.

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Mr. Muravchik scrutinizes these architects of the Carter rights program, citing their remarks in testimony and interviews. His preference for their quotations over his own adjectives, and his attempts to point out the range of beliefs among the policy makers, enhance the value of his book as a historical record.

In Mr. Muravchik's view, the Carter human-rights cadres focused too much on individual cases by putting "integrity of the person" atop its list of abuses. They counted beatings instead of "the numbers of independent newspapers or political parties or labor unions or churches or judicial acquittals. One approach focuses on measuring the cruelty; the other on measuring the freedom."

Mr. Carter's team also emphasized economic and social "rights" of the sort that communist countries usually have stressed: shelter, food, jobs and the like. This was, Mr. Muravchik says, "an act of humility, a way of demonstrating America's willingness to defer to the ideas of others when

they conflicted with our own."

By the same token, the Carter rights people paid less attention to violations of the rule of law, rule by consent of the governed, due process, freedom of expression and the right to emigrate. Mr. Muravchik thinks this ranking of priorities was absurd: "To speak in terms of 'violations' in the Soviet Union or in many other countries is implicitly vastly to understate the problem, because the word 'violation' suggests something that contradicts a norm. But in the U.S.S.R. . . . silence and obedience are the norm."

This argument has appeal, though commitment to condemning the sweeping suppression of rights shouldn't prevent the pressing of individual cases at the same time. Amnesty International's record in alleviating the suffering of a special few is not to be dismissed. Mr. Muravchik himself concurs with the comment of Carter aide Mark Schneider that "it is easier to move repressive regimes on violations of the integrity of the person first," and includes publicizing the plight of select dissidents among his concluding agenda.

If Mr. Muravchik thinks the priorities among abuses were misplaced, he frowns even more on the Carterites' inconsistent application of the policy to various target nations. Through a painstaking review of American actions in world development agencies, he shows how the U.S. under Mr. Carter heaped sanctions on some nondemocratic confederates, such as Argentina and Chile, while courting left dictatorships such as Yugoslavia, Panama and China. Fresher is his observation that, like previous administrations, the Carter White House treated human rights as secondary to other considerations. Asia, Eastern Europe, the Arab world and much of Africa slid by because rulers there were of perceived strategic value to the U.S. As dear a price as was paid in Iran and Nicaragua, Mr. Muravchik argues, the administration actually wanted human rights on the cheap.

Finally, there is the matter of results. Where Mr. Carter tried "punitive" measures, Mr. Muravchik calculates, the human-rights situation marginally worsened over 1977-1981. Those countries spared the scourge registered a small improvement. For his measurements, the author relies on ratings from Freedom House, a rights group that strongly attaches Western values to its inquiries.

Mr. Muravchik is unabashedly pro-West, but scholarship seems to outweigh bias here. Given his well-established sympathies for Israel, one might question the repeated references to Saudi Arabia's practice of cutting off thieves' hands, when treatment of common-law criminals isn't brought up

elsewhere in the book. But such idiosyncrasies do not overwhelm.

More open to challenge is the book's larger conclusion. Mr. Muravchik emphasizes that the withholding of American aid as a method of reproach represents a U.S. retreat from its world role. "Non-interventionism became the hallmark of {Mr. Carter's} presidency," he writes. Penny-pinching old-line conservatives in Congress helped this policy along. The moral shortcomings of an ally or client were a convenient excuse for America Firsters and Blame America Firsters alike to pull feathers off the Eagle's broad wings.

By the book's end, Mr. Muravchik has built on that criticism to propose the U.S. instead open its wallet and extend its reach in the cause of human rights. He likes the controversial National Endowment for Democracy as a mechanism, and he doesn't want cynical exceptions made for the sake of short-run foreign-policy goals.

The dangers of such intrusiveness are manifest even if he is talking about words and not (necessarily) military might. Can U.S. standards be imposed where they are in every way foreign and might be seen as an affront to sovereignty? Mr. Muravchik is not too worried. He thinks the State Department's annual human-rights survey is one laudable legacy of the Carter reign.

Such universalism sets him against the Robert Tuckers who today resist "unselective engagement" and the Robert Tafts who yesterday challenged the American Century. Indeed, when Mr. Muravchik invokes the words "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights" as a charter for global U.S. involvement, he begs an even earlier argument. It was John Quincy Adams who said America "goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own." The echo we may be hearing in the Muravchik proposal is not from Thomas Jefferson but Eleanor Roosevelt, for whom, in James Burnham's words, "the entire globe was spread out like a gigantic slum eagerly awaiting the visit of an international legion of case workers."

Still, Mr. Muravchik and his latent critics on the right do not disagree about the fundamental threat to peace and freedom in today's world. And the author suggests a moral imperative that can link the neoconservative and Old Right camps.

Certainly, in these days when a U.S. president not afflicted with Mr. Carter's naivete or the Ford/Kissinger agnosticism nevertheless plays host to an

outgoing Soviet ambassador and a Russian stooge girl on a "peace" mission but not to Yelena Bonner, a call to virtue is to be welcomed. Especially one as well put together as "The Uncertain Crusade."

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Mr. Ferguson is editorial-features editor of the Journal.

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