

Hillary Clinton's double standards on human rights

During the 1980s, the United States was seriously divided over U.S. policy toward Central America. The Reagan administration was propping up a brutal military-backed regime in El Salvador that was responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of people, including priests, nuns and catechists, along with labor, student and human rights leaders, as well as peasants who happened to live in areas supporting the opposition.

The Reagan administration also attempted to bring down the leftist Sandinista government in Nicaragua by mining the country's harbors; sabotaging oil installations; and organizing, training, arming and funding a mercenary army, led by leaders of the former Somoza dictatorship's national guard, which primarily attacked civilian targets.

The Reagan administration refused to acknowledge the indigenous roots of Central American revolutions or the diversity of the left-wing popular movements it was targeting — which included social democrats, liberation theologians, Marxist-Leninists and others. Instead, it blamed Cuba and the Soviet Union for plotting to subjugate the region into totalitarian rule.

Human rights groups, liberal organizations, peace activists, and Catholic and Protestant clergy and laity organized to challenge U.S. policy. Many activists traveled to Nicaragua in solidarity with the people of that besieged country.

Among those was Bernie Sanders, then mayor of Burlington, Vt.

In ways reminiscent of the redbaiting common during the Cold War, the Hillary Clinton campaign has seized on the Vermont senator's activism during this period as a means of attacking him as a supporter of communism. [As columnist Glenn* Greenwald noted at *The Intercept*](#), "It seems that, overnight, Clinton and her supporters have decided that Sanders's opposition to Reagan-era wars against Latin American governments and rebel groups — a common liberal position at the time — is actually terribly wrong and something worthy of demonization rather than admiration, because those governments and groups abused human rights."

Similarly, New York University history professor Greg Grandin noted [in an interview on *Democracy Now*](#), "So, in Hillary Clinton's worldview, interventionist worldview, she has come so far that to say good things about the Sandinistas in 1985 is supposedly outside the mainstream."

At the time, however, it was not. Most Democrats, including moderate elements of the party like House Speaker Jim Wright (D-Texas), were willing to note some positive achievements by that left-wing government.

During a nationally televised debate in March, Clinton also dug up a statement Sanders had made more than 30 years earlier in which he acknowledged the Cuban revolution's faults but also noted the progress the country had made in transforming the values of that once grossly stratified country into a more egalitarian and less racist society where people were working for the common good.

She stated, "I just couldn't disagree more. You know, if the values are that you oppress people, you disappear people, you imprison people or even kill people for expressing their opinions, for expressing freedom of speech, that is not the kind of revolution of values that I ever want to see anywhere."

This came just moments after Sanders had reiterated how he recognized that Cuba was “an authoritarian, undemocratic country” and he wanted to see Cuba “move in a more democratic direction,” but appreciated its advances since the 1959 revolution in education, health care and other human needs.

Not only did Clinton ignore Sanders’ decidedly mixed assessment of the Castro regime, it was also inaccurate: While Cuba remains an authoritarian one-party state and scores of people remain in prison for nonviolent dissent, it has been well over a quarter century since anyone has been killed or disappeared.

She didn’t respond to the focus of Sanders’ statement during the debate, which was his objections to U.S. intervention in Latin America, particularly the sordid history of overthrowing democratically elected governments such as in Guatemala and Chile.

This was perhaps because it might call attention to her admitted role in helping to consolidate the 2009 coup in Honduras against the democratically elected government of Manuel Zelaya, or her close relationship with Henry Kissinger — whom she has referred to as “a friend” and said she “relied on his counsel when I served as secretary of state.” Kissinger was a major architect in the downfall of the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973.

Indeed, Clinton herself has been an outspoken supporter of some of the world’s worst dictators.

One dictatorship that really has killed and disappeared people is Morocco, which has been repeatedly documented by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other reputable human rights groups. However, when Clinton visited Morocco as secretary of state, she offered unconditional praise for the Moroccan government’s human rights record.

Another dictator praised by Clinton was Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak. In 2009, Secretary of State Clinton noted, “I really consider President and Mrs. Mubarak to be friends of my family.”

Two years later, in 2011, during a popular pro-democracy uprising against the regime, she insisted that he was “looking for ways to respond to the legitimate needs and interests of the Egyptian people.”

After Saudi Arabian forces joined those of the Bahraini monarchy in brutally repressing nonviolent pro-democracy demonstrators the following month, [*The Wall Street Journal* reported](#) that Clinton had emerged as one of the “leading voices inside the administration urging greater U.S. support for the Bahraini king.” She has long considered a “top priority” the promotion of arms transfers to Saudi Arabia, which is not only one of the world’s most repressive regimes but has been using U.S. jets and ordinance in air strikes in Yemen that have killed thousands of civilians.

In her last visit as secretary of state to Uzbekistan— a brutal dictatorship that has gunned down hundreds of pro-democracy demonstrators, boiled opponents to death in oil, and sends hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren annually into forced labor in the cotton fields — she declined to meet with leading human rights activists. Instead, she emphasized “the importance of Uzbekistan to the region and to our national interest.”

It is certainly not new for politicians of either party to have double standards when it comes to human rights. Still, it is disappointing to have the leading Democratic candidate for president attack those who took principled stances against U.S. support for terror and repression.

**An earlier version of this column listed an incorrect first name for Glenn Greenwald.*

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