

How China 'is home to the worst human rights crises of our time'

It's why the U.S. Commission on Unalienable rights is so necessary

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The Trump administration led the fight for human rights at the U.N. General Assembly last week, calling out China for forced internment of more than 1 million Uighurs in "training camps" to be "re-educated" and "saved" from their culture, language and faith.

According to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, China is the perpetrator of "the worst human rights crises of our time." China denies this, touting itself a defender of human rights by providing "development, health, nutrition, and housing" — its own "approach" to human rights that has nothing to do with individual freedoms.

China's approach is not surprising given that international human rights advocacy is so "watered down" by political agenda that it's hard to tell the difference between protecting God-given natural rights and government entitlements.

To help rectify this, Mr. Pompeo recently announced the U.S. Commission on Unalienable Rights to ground U.S. foreign policy on human rights in America's founding principles of individual dignity and freedom. The Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, as well as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), are guides for the commission.

The Declaration of Independence states that unalienable rights are based in God-given natural law and include "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." These rights, like freedom of conscience and belief, are "natural" because they're inherent to all human beings and are to be protected by government, not given by government, as demonstrated in the U.S. Bill of Rights.

Natural rights should not be confused with government-given entitlements created for certain interest groups, as a need arises or as societies change. Sometimes it is hard to discern the difference, and this is what the U.S. commission will address.

Sadly, as in the case of China, confusion about fundamental rights offers cover to authoritarian and totalitarian governments that provide benefits to citizens as a demonstration of "human rights," all the while censoring the press, oppressing religious freedom or imprisoning political dissidents. As the Declaration of Independence states, the purpose of government is to secure unalienable rights and any government that does not is illegitimate. A watereddown human rights narrative takes focus off of the real victims of abuse — like a Sudanese woman imprisoned for her Christian faith, men in Syria and Iraq being thrown off buildings, and more than 1 million imprisoned Uighurs. In today's hyper-sensitive climate of rightsbased advocacy,

so many now advocate in the name of “human rights” that economic and social goals are often confused with fundamental or unalienable rights, leading to less individual freedom, not more.

Examples of this activism includes the “rights” to free university education, Internet access, compete on women’s sports teams, legalized abortion and even the right not to be offended. We all have differing opinions about these, but that’s the point. By primarily protecting our “natural” human rights, we also protect the freedom to pursue differing political goals and ideological preferences.

Some left-leaning senators have stated concern that the U.S. commission will not protect “internationally recognized definitions of human rights, particularly ... reproductive rights and the rights of ... LGBT persons.” This demonstrates not only a misunderstanding of “internationally recognized definitions of human rights” (i.e. there is no international right to abortion, and furthermore the majority of countries in the world oppose it), but again the need to “refocus” on what human rights really are. For example, women and the LGBT community are covered by the same fundamental human rights of all people. That’s the great thing about universal human rights — they’re not just for identity groups — they’re for everybody because all have inherent dignity and the right to individual freedoms.

The very fact that some cry that the commission will hurt these groups demonstrates its necessity: People confuse the promotion of a sexual-rightsidentity- group agenda with fundamental human rights. The United States will continue to stand against the oppression and abuse of all people, and for this reason, everyone — including the most prominent women’s rights and LGBT organizations — should get squarely behind this commission.

Mr. Pompeo and his staff are to be commended for their “fresh thinking” approach to U.S. foreign policy. A letter, signed by 46 of the most influential human rights, women’s and religious freedom leaders and organizations, applauds Mr. Pompeo for establishing the commission.

One word of caution for the commission — the UDHR, though a historically important document which elevated the protection of individual freedoms, was one of the first examples of conflating fundamental human rights with social and economic goals, and this should be kept in mind.

In the end, the U.S. Commission on Unalienable Rights will do more than help rectify human rights abuses. It will uncover the agenda of some countries that hide behind economic and social achievements as a sign of protecting human rights.

Moreover, it will ultimately reassert the right kind of American leadership in the international liberal order. This leadership is based, as it should be, in America’s founding principles of God-given life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness — the principles which led to what the world calls “American exceptionalism.”

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