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# Hamstringing our friends

WILLIAM P. CHESHIRE

What a different world it would be if Congress, so circumspect in establishing standards of behavior for our friends, would apply the same rules to our adversaries. A case in point:

Evidently unimpressed that Salvadoran voters, in a free election, chose the moderate Jose Napoleon Duarte president, a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee last week recommended that Washington continue to attach strings to U.S. aid.

Restrictions now require the administration to certify every six months that El Salvador is showing a "willingness to pursue a dialogue" with the Communists who are trying to shoot their way into office, is exercising control over the military that sometimes shoots back, and is working toward political and economic reforms that are already in place.

Where has the Foreign Affairs subcommittee been?

The same day this group went out of its way to antagonize El Salvador's friendly and democratic government, the Agriculture Department issued the heart-warming announcement that the Soviet Union

had bought an additional 300,000 metric tons of grain from the United States, establishing a new yearly high — 17 million tons.

Under a long-term agreement with this country, the Soviets are permitted to buy only 12 million tons annually without special permission. Special permission was granted this year for the purchase of an additional 10 million tons, half of which has yet to be delivered.

Is this aid? Of course it's aid — and aid of the sort that the Soviets, unable to nourish their own people, desperately require. Are political strings attached? No. When the hungry Soviets ask for more porridge, Washington follows the high-minded — some would say simple-minded — policy laid down by President Gerald Ford.

In the aftermath of Washington's mishandling of the 1972 grain deal, Mr. Ford took a bad situation and contrived to make it worse.

Absorbed in the quest for détente, Washington had permitted the Soviets to buy 13 million tons of grain futures with \$500 million borrowed from the U.S. Treasury at 6½ percent — money it paid back, *The New York Times* reported, "with what are, for them, half-price dollars."

"The high cost of the remaining

U.S. grain," writes historian Paul Johnson, "was one of the factors which led OPEC to quadruple the cost of oil," precipitating worldwide inflation, famine, and much America-bashing (though no Soviet bashing) at the 1974 World Food Conference.

Struck by the wasted opportunity, the Central Intelligence Agency recommended that "as custodian of the bulk of the world's exportable grain," America should use this leverage to "regain the primacy in world affairs that it held in the immediate postwar period."

President Ford, a marvelously decent man, would not hear of it. It was not U.S. policy, he assured America's enemies, "to use food as a political weapon, despite the oil embargo."

Mr. Ford was moved by a noble spirit, and certainly in a world where millions are starving to death a case can be made for compassion. But even in a hungry world, it makes little sense for the United States to bail out Soviet agriculture without extracting political concessions.

The objection is made — the ears fairly ring with it — that if the United States doesn't put its resources at the disposal of the Politburo, someone greedier will get the Kremlin's business. This solipsism is put forward to justify all manner of commerce, from the sale of food to the building of factories where army trucks are produced.

It is pure twaddle. The United States is so dominant in the international grain market that, as a practical matter, the Soviets must do business with us or risk widespread

famine. In the years of plenteousness, they may not need our wheat, but without it their people will starve in the years of dearth.

The Ukraine, once Europe's breadbasket but now farmed according to the quirky principles of Karl Marx (who wouldn't have known a plowshare from a clevice clevis), no longer produces food in any abundance. Assuming that the Kremlin has no wish to incite food riots, it should be possible for Washington to engage in, shall we say, a little constructive diplomacy. Instead of leaning on Mr. Duarte, it ought to be leaning on Mr. Gorbachev.

Even if El Salvador were not an ally of ours, what sense would it make for this country to fiddle with her domestic arrangements? We demand Boy Scout department from Salvadorans, but furnish 22 million tons of grain to the Soviet Union, one of the most hideous despotisms in the entire history of the world. It makes no sense.

For political reasons, we seem determined to enrich Kansas agribusiness by feeding the Red Army. But shouldn't we apply the Salvadoran test, insisting that Moscow show a "willingness to pursue a dialogue" with, say, the Afghan mujahideen, exercise control over KGB "death squads," and work toward political and economic reforms? And perhaps we should lay off El Salvador as well, whose government Moscow is attempting to subvert.

Where American interests are so plainly identifiable, it should be the policy of our government to advance them, instead of following a policy of inconsistent piety that is pleasing to our enemies, injurious to our friends. How about a surcharge on wheat with which to finance anti-Soviet insurgency groups?

*William P. Cheshire is editor of the editorial pages of The Washington Times.*