

(CNN) President Donald Trump's trip through the Middle East should puncture a myth Americans have been fed for generations: that this country's foreign policy lives up to its high-minded rhetoric on the advancement of human rights.

Jonathan Tasini

Donald Trump took a lot of heat several weeks ago for his warm words for Philippines authoritarian leader Rodrigo Duterte, who has been widely criticized for alleged human rights abuses in his war on drugs. But in his cozying up to Duterte, President Trump has simply followed a long tradition. For decades, Democrats and Republicans alike have chosen allies principally based on the strategic and economic priorities of the United States, no matter how much blood flowed from such choices. The global human toll that has been run up as a cost of advancing US interests is not a recent development. American foreign policy may have been wrapped in the language of human rights, but its actions have often fostered anything but.

Henry Kissinger, an adviser to politicians from Richard Nixon to Donald Trump to Hillary Clinton, had no concern for human rights as he orchestrated illegal bombings of Cambodia and Vietnam, causing the deaths and displacement of millions of people; the 1973 overthrow of the democratically elected president of Chile, Salvador Allende, which ushered in a murderous dictatorship; and the support for the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1975, whose military occupation of over a quarter of a century caused roughly 100,000 deaths.

In the 1980s, the US strongly supported Napoleon Jose Duarte, the head of a military junta in El Salvador. For many years, Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos ran a brutal regime in the Philippines but were close US allies, receiving billions of dollars in aid in return for the stationing of thousands of American soldiers at a network of US military bases. As his presidency wound down, Barack Obama signed a 10-year, \$40-billion military aid package with Israel. Meanwhile, Israel's ongoing treatment of Palestinians imposes what Jimmy Carter has called apartheid. Human Rights Watch recently concluded that Israel continues to "enforce severe and discriminatory restrictions on Palestinians' human rights" and that "Israeli security forces used lethal force ... including in circumstances that suggest excessive force and at times extrajudicial executions."

