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# Reagan, Congress, and Human Rights

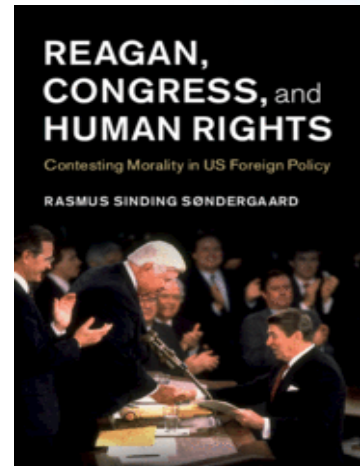
## Contesting Morality in US Foreign Policy

**Rasmus Sindig Søndergaard**

*Lunds Universitet, Sweden*

This book traces the role of human rights concerns in US foreign policy during the 1980s, focusing on the struggle among the Reagan administration and members of Congress. It demonstrates how congressional pressure led the administration to reconsider its approach to human rights and craft a conservative human rights policy centered on democracy promotion and anti-communism - a decision which would have profound implications for American attention to human rights. Based on extensive archival research and interviews, Rasmus Sindig Søndergaard combines a comprehensive overview of human rights in American foreign relations with in-depth case studies of how human rights shaped US foreign policy toward Soviet Jewry, South African apartheid, and Nicaragua. Tracing the motivations behind human rights activism, this book demonstrates how liberals, moderates, and conservatives selectively invoked human rights to further their agendas, ultimately contributing to the establishment of human rights as a core moral language in US foreign policy.

Introduction; 1. After the breakthrough: human rights in American foreign relations in the 1980s; 2. The Reagan turnaround on human rights; 3. The Congressional human rights caucus and the limits of bipartisanship; 4. The right to leave: Soviet Jewish emigration; 5. 'A universal human rights issue': South African apartheid; 6. Two tales of human rights: US policy toward Nicaragua; Conclusion.



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'In explaining how idealists in Congress forced the Reagan administration to embrace and recast human rights, Søndergaard reveals how profoundly the trajectory of US human rights policy was determined by contestation between the executive and the legislature. This richly researched book illuminates a poorly understood decade in the development of international human rights and recovers the role of overlooked actors, both in Congress and outside government.'

**Barbara Keys,**  
*Durham University*



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