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More Bull From the China Shop

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that would obliterate U.S.-China bilateral trade. Instead of tariff rates automatically escalating to Smoot-Hawley levels, President Clinton can establish tariff increases of any size. Setting a less-than-punitive rate would squeeze Beijing, but trade would continue.

At the same time, it is crucial for the administration to move quickly on other fronts internationally and domestically. Washington must aggressively solicit the help of the Japanese, Korean and European governments in sending a unified message to Beijing. A multilateral effort including, but not limited to, United Nations human rights mechanisms is necessary.

Washington must also press the corporate community to act on its claim that business can be a positive force for human rights. Foreign investors are players in China's politically crucial drive for economic prosperity and they are often well-positioned to make their concerns felt.

While there are limits to the effectiveness of external human rights pressure, this is the moment for a firm human rights policy. Experience has demonstrated that Beijing does respond to pressure and President Clinton must demonstrate that he is not about to abandon human rights. Given Beijing's total disregard for international norms, ending the linkage between China's MFN status and human rights would not only have serious negative effects in China, it would cripple the administration's ability to speak and act effectively elsewhere. ☉

More Bull From the China Shop

by Wendell L. Willkie II

Almost [a year has] passed since Clinton issued his executive order conditioning normal trade relation upon China's making "overall significant progress" in its human rights practices. With few tangible results, it's time to recognize that the policy is based upon a fundamental misconception as to how America most effectively advances freedom in other countries.

[I]s not systemic change in China far more likely to occur as a result of inex-

orably increasing internal pressures - rising out of an exploding market economy and the growing exposure to Western values? Can the United States most effectively advance economic and political liberalization in China through normalized, indeed, enhanced commercial and cultural engagement?

The Clinton administration appears, confusingly, to come down on both sides of this fundamental issue. On the one hand, Christopher and other State Department officials admonish the Chinese that they are failing to meet the terms of Clinton's executive order. On the other hand, Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen and Chairman of the National Economic Council Robert Rubin have stressed the compelling American interest in normal trade relations with China. They have publicly suggested that if only the Chinese could satisfy the President's relatively modest conditions this one time, then MFN should no longer be linked to America's human rights objectives. Of course, the very existence of the issue can only be considered a historical accident. In the emotional months after Tiananmen Square in 1989, there was no serious debate about withdrawing from normal trade relations.

But beginning in 1990, Congress sought to impose new conditions on MFN in the areas of trade, security, and human rights. In Congress, to vote for conditional MFN was to go on record in support of important American objectives in China. And as China each year took certain palliative measures to address the concerns of its congressional critics, members of Congress believed they were playing "bad cop" to Bush's "good cop."

Clinton, in issuing the executive order, has essentially adopted the congressional position on the conditionality of MFN; U.S. policy now alternates between ritual invocation of the MFN threat and frequent high-level meetings with the Chinese, seeking anxiously to find reasons not to use this weapon. The administration thus finds itself in the untenable position of attempting to play "bad cop" and "good cop" at the same time. Of course, given the implications for American interests of withdrawal of MFN, the Clinton administration now has a tremendous incentive to characterize any Chinese initiatives in

human rights as meaningful.

But in diplomacy as elsewhere, it is generally unwise to engage in threats unless one is prepared to act upon them. Brandishing a mutually destructive and therefore dubious weapon - in pursuit of worthy but very limited objectives - does little to enhance America's standing in the world. This has indeed been a policy that gives every appearance of having been dictated by yesterday's battles in Washington, not today's challenges in China.

It is no wonder that Lloyd Bentsen and Robert Rubin have publicly suggested that America's human rights concerns should be "de-linked" from MFN. They focus, wisely, on U.S. initiatives to expand China's markets. This approach would further both our commercial interests and our political ideals.

There are more credible ways the administration can promote human rights. The United States, for example, should take greater advantage of its leverage in multilateral organizations, such as the U.N. Human Rights Commission and

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international lending institutions. The administration could demonstrate support for Chinese democracy by establishing official contact with the government of Taiwan. And the President can speak out, when circumstances warrant, in support of the cause of freedom.

The most sensible American policy will be one that takes full cognizance of the remarkable changes that have already occurred, moves beyond earlier political debates in Washington and effectively pursues the opportunities that China now presents for the advancement of American ideals and interests. In the final analysis, it should be recognized that the inspiration of American ideals is far more powerful in advancing human rights than the threat of economic sanctions. ☉