

ARTICLE

Nancy Pelosi and Human Rights in China

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Preface¹

The end of the Cold War clearly relieved the United States from a self-assigned responsibility of containing Communist Russia. The fact naturally gave the U.S. a certain leeway to seek new foreign policy goals along with continuously important security purposes. Especially since the Tiananmen Square incident in China, the human rights situation of the world was increasingly discussed in the American political scene if it has not yet become a centerpiece of US foreign policy.

Historically human rights share a unique position in the American political tradition. At least three wars were fought more or less in the name of human rights. They are the U.S. Independence War, the U.S. Civil War, and the World War I. Even talking of the Post World War II era, the civil rights movement became a focal point of political debates during 1960s. Therefore human rights are often believed to be an unshakable part of American values. In the post-Cold War period, the rising importance of human rights in US foreign policy culminated in the military intervention of US-led NATO forces in Serbia in 1999.

Here a few important questions will naturally arise in our minds. For example, how far is the US ready to go for human rights improvement in the world? Is the US willing to use military means whenever other options fail to solve human rights problems? Will the American government militarily intervene regardless of the size and strength of a nation? This paper tries to partially answer these significant questions through examining the human rights problems in China. The focus is, however, on American domestic politics rather than on the actual human rights situation in China, because the purpose of the paper is to clarify American intentions and capabilities for achieving human rights goals. Our story starts with the Tiananmen Square incident.

I

The Tiananmen Square incident of June 4, 1989 made a clear end of the harmonious relationship between the United States and China which lasted nearly two decades after President Richard Nixon's visit to China. Along with the shocking incident, a series of democratic revolutions in Eastern European nations in the same year and the continuation

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of Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union indicated that the 'China card' was no longer needed by the United States.

Immediately after the incident, the Bush administration imposed some sanctions against China, including a halt on high-level government contacts and a ban on weapon sales. In mid-July, the summit of seven major Western democracies in Paris called for Chinese efforts to improve the human rights situation and to restore its relations with the West.² There were, then, seven World Bank loans to China being considered. George Bush announced that the U.S. was postponing support for such loans and the leaders attending the Paris summit also asked the World Bank to suspend them.³

The massacre at the Tiananmen Square became a turning point also for the Democratic Representative of San Francisco, Nancy Pelosi. Pelosi was first elected to the House in 1987 and, before the incident, had devoted a great deal of energy to issues such as AIDS spending, the future of the Presidio, and the ban on assault weapons. So she was a typical liberal politician. But the crackdown at the Tiananmen Square made her a crusader for human rights in China. From then on, the issue defined the congresswoman in the minds of the national media and many of her colleagues, and earned her countless appearances on talk shows and numerous references in the pages of national newspapers.⁴

The national consensus over the China policy was, however, soon to break. Despite the self-assigned ban on the high-level official contacts, the secret trips to Beijing in July and December by national security adviser Brent Scowcroft and Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence S. Eagleburger were disclosed. Democratic National Chairman Ronald H. Brown responded that "there has not been a decision so out of touch with American values since the sale of arms to the ayatollah." The President then shot back. Asked if his overtures to China did not amount to a "salute to a brutal regime," Bush answered: "I don't think it's a salute. If the question is: 'Do I want to further isolate a billion-plus people,' the answer is no."⁵

Since these controversial trips, relations between the Bush administration and the Democratic-majority Congress turned sour over China policy. During the winter of 1989-1990, Representative Pelosi sponsored the legislation to allow 40,000 Chinese students to remain in the United States after their visas expired. Pelosi argued, "Congress must send a very clear signal to the butchers of Beijing." The President however vetoed the bill. Bush wanted to maintain his own prerogatives in foreign policy in order to keep China policy flexible, and issued an executive order of same character.⁶

Nancy Pelosi conflicted most fiercely with George Bush over the extension of most-favored-nation treatment of China. Most-favored-nation status allows goods from a country to be imported at lower tariffs, and is granted to almost all major trading partners. Most-favored nation treatment is usually reciprocal, so U.S. goods also benefit from reduced tariffs in other countries.⁷ In 1979, the Carter administration applied MFN for the first time to China.

In May 24, 1990, about a month before the first anniversary of the crackdown at Tiananmen Square, Bush announced in public that he would renew most-favored-nation trade status for China. The Bush administration was considering the impact of a withdrawal of China's trade status on Hong Kong, which relies heavily on re-exports of

Chinese goods, and the benefits to the U.S. of continued economic contact with China.⁸

However, many letters opposing the renewal of MFN unless some improvement on human rights were promised by the Chinese government were sent, for example, to the offices of New York Times. Those letters especially emphasized that Fang Lizhi, China's prominent astrophysicist and human rights advocate should be set free. Senate Majority Leader George J. Mitchell hinted proposing a legislation opposing the President's decision.⁹

Under current U.S. law, President Bush did not need to consider human rights and other issues in deciding on trade with China. Under a law known as the Jackson-Vanick Amendment, the granting of favored trade status is tied to emigration. Nations that do not allow free emigration are to be barred from favored status, but the President can grant one-year waivers. It is such a waiver that Bush exercised in extending China's status.¹⁰

On October 18th in 1990, the U.S. House of Representatives passed Nancy Pelosi-sponsored legislation to revoke MFN treatment of China. The House also decided by an overwhelming majority of 409 to 21 that MFN status should not be renewed the following year unless the release of prisoners arrested during the Tianamen Square incident and other human rights improvements were carried out by the Chinese authorities.¹¹ The bill intended to ameliorate the human rights situation in China by linking it with trade relations between the two countries. The linkage was a clear departure from Bush's quiet diplomacy. Whether human rights would become the central focal point of America's China policy would therefore depend on the Senate's action over the bill.

At the end of February in 1991, the Senate also passed legislation to impose conditions on the renewal of China's most-favored-nation benefits by a vote of 59 to 39. The result was eight votes short of a two-thirds majority which would have overruled the President's veto.¹² In reality it was passed, only to be vetoed later by the President.

In 1989, the amount of trade between China and the U.S. reached \$20 billion. Although the balance was a \$10.4 billion deficit on the American side, the U.S. was undoubtedly building its fastest growing bilateral trade relations with China.¹³ It is this fact the Bush administration could not easily dismiss.

In addition, China was disgruntled about the moves of the US Congress. The PRC Foreign Ministry published a strong statement which denounced foreign interference of China's domestic affairs and emphasized its readiness for the revocation of MFN.¹⁴

The first round of the battle over MFN thus resulted in the defeat of Representative Pelosi. The fight between Bush and Pelosi would, however, continue over the next two years.

II

As the second anniversary of the incident approached, so did the next date for MFN renewal. As expected from the previous year's experience, President Bush announced on May 15th a renewal of MFN treatment for China for one more year. Disappointed by the President's decision, Nancy Pelosi criticized the inequality of Bush's treatment of China, comparing it with that of the Soviet Union that had not yet received MFN status at that time. Bush cited China's support of U.S. policy during the Gulf War as an important

reason for the MFN renewal. Pelosi refuted that the Soviet attitude on the war was not that different from China's. The Representative continued that the revocation of MFN would mean for China heavy losses in the US market. Therefore it was America's responsibility to impose economic pressure on China in order to make her abide by democratic principles.¹⁵

On June 4, 1991, the second anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown, the Congressional human rights caucus and several Chinese groups sponsored a rally in Washington which was highlighted by the signing of a petition demanding the release of 1,100 Chinese political prisoners. Earlier in the day, House Majority Leader Richard A. Gephard, Representative Nancy Pelosi and several other members led a protest at the Chinese Embassy and sought unsuccessfully to deliver a letter to the Chinese Ambassador.¹⁶

On June 25th, the Senate Majority leader Mitchel and several Democratic Senators hinted at proposing a new legislation which would condition the renewal of MFN and which, at the same time, may gather two thirds of Senate votes.¹⁷ What they implied was some strategic lowering of the conditions. In July the House and Senate passed differing bills that would deny further MFN status to China unless President Bush could certify that Beijing had met a list of conditions, such as the release of prisoners and export prohibition on the products of forced labors of prisoners. The 55-44 margin in the Senate, however, indicated that an expected veto of the bill by Bush would be sustained under existing conditions. House and Senate leaders then named members of a coordinating committee to reconcile the differences in the two bills and move toward a showdown with Bush.

Meanwhile, Treasury Secretary James Baker's trip to China in mid-November was announced by the State Department. It was the first cabinet-level visit by US government officials since Scowcroft's secret trips in 1989. Representative Nancy Pelosi commented that the Baker visit would be "a triumph for the repressive regime in Beijing" unless something "very dramatic" emerges from it. By dramatic, Pelosi said she meant, for example, the release of political prisoners arrested in the 1989 crackdown or major moves in the trade or nonproliferation areas.

Asia Watch, a human rights organization, reported that a list of more than 800 political prisoners was presented by the State Department to the Chinese government in May, but that only 10 prisoners were conditionally released, while some new arrests were reported. Asia Watch Executive Director Sidney Jones charged that quiet diplomacy on the issue "failed utterly" and said that Baker should not go to China unless the Chinese regime was willing to make a "credible commitment" toward releasing political prisoners.¹⁸

China had shown slight conciliatory gestures before and during Baker's three day trip to Beijing. On October 18th, the Chinese government signed a contract to purchase 13 airplanes from Boeing.¹⁹ With Baker, Chinese leaders agreed to exchange a memorandum to prohibit export of prisoner-produced goods to the US. The compromise by the Chinese government was probably made, because the amount of those products were in fact negligible.²⁰

In the United States, The House had approved in November by 409 to 21 the

legislation which came out of the House-Senate coordinating committee.²¹ In fact, to ensure the voting numbers that could override a Presidential veto, Nancy Pelosi streamlined the conditions for China's retention of most-favored-nation trading status, requiring Beijing to (1) release the estimated 1,000 prisoners still imprisoned from the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, (2) stop selling any missiles to Syria and Iran and (3) show "progress," as determined by the President, on other human rights, proliferation and trade issues.

The Washington Post editorial on February 6, 1992, clearly supported Pelosi's position by arguing, "Bush keeps saying that the United States can't influence Beijing if it 'isolates' Beijing. But it plays directly into the Communist leadership's hands to depict every congressional effort to condition MFN as 'isolating' China."²²

Therefore it was the Senate's turn to decide whether the U.S. would finally adopt a high posture in terms of human rights in China or follow the Bush's lead of quiet diplomacy. The result was that the Senate passed on February 26 in 1992 the legislation to impose conditions on the renewal of China's most-favored-nation benefits by a vote of 59 to 39. That again meant eight votes short of a two-thirds majority to overrule the President's veto.²³

On March 2, President Bush vetoed the legislation again. "There is no doubt in my mind that if we present China's leaders an ultimatum...the result will be weakened ties to the West and further repression," Bush declared in his written veto message. "...We are making a difference in China by remaining engaged." The President also insisted that his policy has achieved results. He pointed to China's agreement to abide by an international accord limiting the transfer of missile technology, to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and its agreement "after years of stonewalling" to discuss U.S. concerns about human rights in China.

Representative Pelosi rebuked that Bush's veto was aiding China's hard-line Communists. "By vetoing clear, reasonable conditions for the renewal of MFN, the President risks losing China to another generation of repression and tyranny," she said.²⁴

After the President vetoed such a bill, the House voted overwhelmingly to override him. But the Senate vote on March 18 in favor of an override was 60 to 38, six votes short of the two-thirds margin needed to enact the legislation over Bush's opposition.²⁵ Despite all the effort, the result was again the inescapable defeat of Representative Pelosi and her supporters.

What differentiated Bush with Pelosi was his choice of means and ends in America's China policy. The President obviously believed that a continuous growth of economic relations with China would be the foremost goal of his China policy. In fact, the amount of trade between US and China had grown to \$25 billion in 1991. In the same year, California, Pelosi's home state, as well as a key state for Bush's reelection, exported \$1 billion worth of goods to China — nearly one sixth of the U.S. total of \$6.2 billion. In addition, imports from China had become crucial to several Californian industries. Total imports to California amounted to \$6.8 billion. A breakdown in trade relations between the two countries would affect as many as 19,000 export-related jobs in California, according to U.S. Commerce Department estimates.²⁶ Bush considered that troubles over MFN extension would be hazardous for the growth of US-China economic relations. The

President also considered that the U.S. might assert a certain positive influence for human rights improvements in China, by means of continuous engagement with China. Thus, the policy of “comprehensive engagements” was the best and only means for Bush to achieve both goals of having growing economic relations as well as the human rights improvements. Based on these ideas, On June 2 in 1992, Bush notified Congress of another renewal of China’s MFN treatment.²⁷

“The president is giving the Beijing authorities an anniversary present of \$15 billion” in trade benefits, Pelosi said. She also said the renewal action followed China’s recent test of a 1-megaton nuclear weapon.²⁸ In contrast to Bush, Pelosi thought of economic relations as merely a means to achieve the goal of implanting human rights consciousness in China. Thus she tried to link MFN with human rights. Pelosi believed that Bush, by decoupling the two, was economically sustaining the repressive regime in Beijing and that it was morally unjustifiable. The result was lack of consensus between the White House and the Congress. They obviously could not reach a unified definition of national interests. As the memory of the Tiananmen Square massacre was gradually waning, Representative Nancy Pelosi however looked more like a lone crusader.

III

In the spring of 1992, Pelosi’s battle against Bush over the MFN status for China was practically over. But, during the summer and fall of 1992, she and her supporters in the Congress tried one more shot, probably for a different purpose. On July 22, the House passed the legislation to condition the extension of China’s MFN treatment again. The Senate also passed a similar bill on September 14. On September 28, President Bush vetoed the bill just as he did on the previous cases. On October 1, the voting result in the Senate showed that the veto was not overruled on that occasion either.

Despite the same disappointing result for Pelosi, she and her allies perhaps have succeeded in impressing the American public during the Presidential campaign how unsympathetic President Bush was of human miseries in China. In fact, Democratic Presidential candidate Bill Clinton himself repeatedly criticized the lack of a human rights policy during the Bush administration, by saying that the President was “coddling the dictators.” Thus Clinton’s victory in the Presidential election also meant a sweet victory for Pelosi and human-rights supporters in the Congress, since the next President would emphasize the importance of human rights in foreign policy. In fact, as soon as he became the President, Clinton appointed Warren Christopher as his Secretary of State, whose human rights orientation was time-tested since he was the Under Secretary of State during the Carter administration. Indeed Christopher, at his confirmation, said, “Our policy will be to facilitate a broad, peaceful revolution in China from communism to democracy, by encouraging the forces of economic and political liberalization in that great and highly important country.” Thus the start of the Clinton administration seemed to have opened for Pelosi a new chapter for her crusade.

Of course, even Clinton could not ignore the fact that China’s economy was the fastest growing in the world and there existed a surge of interest by American business that

wanted to take advantage of the cheap labor and the growing number of cash-rich Chinese consumers. Direct U.S. investment in China totaled about \$6 billion at that time.

“Over the long term, China will average 7 or 8 percent growth over the next 10 to 15 years, and that’s phenomenal for an economy that’s getting bigger all the time,” said David McKee, Ford Motor Co.’s vice president.²⁹

Adopting some of these economic considerations, the President decided to give China one more year to ameliorate its human rights situation. On May 28, Clinton issued an executive order to the effect that he would extend China’s favored trade status for another year but would condition future extension on human rights progress.

The executive order conditioned the next extension, due in June 1994, on progress in several human rights areas, such as the compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the humane treatment of all prisoners. China also would be required to permit free emigration and the free flow of foreign broadcasts into China. In addition, the order would call for respect for the “distinctive religious and cultural heritage” of Tibet.

Clinton also asked for China to open markets to American products by providing U.S. exporters freer access for software, movies, music recordings and other “intellectual property” and dismantling non-tariff barriers.

Clinton’s order also demanded Chinese compliance with the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), which meant to bar the spread of missiles and nuclear weapons.³⁰

At the White House, Clinton explained the order, a day before the issuance, saying, “because I want to support modernization in China, and it’s a great opportunity for America there.” Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord defended the presidential order as “a very clear departure, a much firmer policy than during the Bush administration.”³¹

Clinton’s move was welcomed by Pelosi who said she was thrilled by Clinton’s executive order, calling it “a very bold and historic move” that “will mirror our legislation in respect to human rights.”³² Pelosi also said. “As long as we are unified, the Chinese will get the message.”³³

On May 31, San Francisco Chronicle commented. “Finally, Washington (the President and the Congress) can stand behind a single policy with twin aims: the expansion of trade and the further marketization of China’s economy, along with a principled means of applying leverage on human rights and, by extension, democratization.”³⁴

Thus the fourth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre approached in a mood of political unity. At the Bay Area, there were protesting demonstrations by human rights organizations on June 4. The ground-breaking plan was implemented for a 12-foot-tall bronze statue of the Goddess of Democracy to be set up in Chinatown’s Portsmouth Square, a quarter size recreation of the towering figure that rose and fell with so many dreams in Tiananmen Square.

A human right organization, Support Democracy in China, and others staged “Boycott die-ins” in front of Toys R Us stores to dramatize the use of prison labor for toy exports, operated an “Adopt-a-Dissident” letter-writing campaign to prisoners and went into Bay Area high schools to urge direct action.³⁵

While there was an appearance of unity in domestic politics, American relations with

China, on the other hand, came to face a variety of turmoils during the summer of 1993. The signs of trouble included Beijing's imprisonment of dissidents and enactment of new travel restraints for labor leaders; its refusal in July to address U.S. concerns about the possible sale to Pakistan of ballistic missiles; a toughening of policy on some trade matters; and its decision in August to rebuke the United States publicly for alleging — mistakenly, it turned out — that a Chinese ship had tried to ferry ingredients of chemical weapons to Iran.³⁶

In addition, on July 26, the US House of Representative passed a resolution to oppose Beijing the site of the Olympic Games in 2000, because of human rights abuses. In September, while China criticized US sales of arms to Taiwan, Clinton demanded abandonment of China's plan for nuclear weapon testing. But China ignored the demand and implemented a test in October.

Meanwhile, in late August, Representative Nancy Pelosi paid a visit to China with other members of the House Intelligence Committee. When she came home, Pelosi left a comment. "I didn't see any progress in human rights at all."³⁷ In fact, Human rights conditions were so bad that Levi Strauss and Timberland clothing companies began to pull out of China, based not on economic factors but ethical guidelines established by the companies.³⁸

IV

As the fall of 1993 came to stay, the posture of Clinton administration toward China, however, had shifted more or less toward a softer approach. Secretary of State Christopher, for example, talked with the Chinese Foreign Minister. During the period Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy and Assistant Defense Secretary for Regional Security, Charles Freeman visited China along with some others. Freeman's visit especially marked the first official contact with the Chinese military that was the symbol of the repression at Tiananmen Square in 1989.

The administration's new strategy, reportedly set forth in a classified memorandum President Clinton signed in September, was meant to halt what many officials regarded as a downward spiral in U.S. relations with a country that has superpower potential.

Senior officials even said in interviews held during the last week of October that they were driven to draft the new policy by signs that the China policy put in place in May — which focused on getting reforms in human rights and halting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction — was failing.³⁹

On November 7, the Washington Post explained in an article that another factor in Clinton's retreat from his campaign rhetoric might be money politics. Before he signed the executive order granting the extension of MFN status to China. Clinton received a letter signed by 298 companies and 37 trade associations requesting that he not attach conditions. Of these 298 companies, 50 gave soft money contributions averaging \$30,000 to the Democratic National Committee, according to Federal Election Commission records.⁴⁰

The clearest indication of China policy drifting was Clinton's decision to meet Chinese President Jiang Zemin alone during the summit meeting of Asia-Pacific Economic

Cooperation forum. In the days before Clinton left for Seattle's APEC Meeting, Pelosi persuaded 269 House members to join her in signing a letter in support of the President's decision in May to grant China a conditional one-year extension of its most favored nation trading status.

As for Jiang's response during the meeting, which included a lecture to Clinton about how one nation should not interfere in the internal matters of another, Pelosi said: "It wasn't very unexpected. What was important was to remove all doubt that this President cannot ask for MFN renewal without human rights improvements. This should now be clear to the Chinese."⁴¹

Pelosi was partly correct that the Clinton administration's overtures to China did not necessarily mean conciliatory gestures all the time. On March 12 in 1994, Secretary of State Christopher arrived in Beijing. The purposes of his visit were to demand again of Chinese leaders clear human rights improvements and investigate China's most recent human rights situation, in order to make a report for the President. Clinton had to decide whether he should renew China's MFN status for another year or not, by the beginning of June. Christopher's forthcoming report would therefore constitute an important base for the President's decision.

On March 20, concerning Christopher's trip, Pelosi criticized the American business executives who denounced the U.S. human rights policy in a Beijing session with Christopher "instead of associating themselves with the values of our country." Pelosi called them, along with some lawyers and public relations firms, "the new China lobby."

She also said Christopher was right in arguing that the Chinese would stall and object but eventually come around because they needed the United States more than the United States needed them.⁴² On March 22, in an article printed in *The Washington Post*, Christopher maintained, "The character of our relationship with China depends significantly on how the Chinese government treats its people."⁴³

During the spring of 1994, the leading Democratic advocates of a tough policy toward China were working with the White House on a compromise that would include limited sanctions but allow a considerable amount of trade to continue if China failed to meet all the human rights objectives laid down by the administration.

In the morning of April 20, for example, Clinton conferred with those ready to consider a more targeted approach which would boycott only imports from state-run industries — Senate majority leader George Mitchell, House majority leader Richard Gephardt and Representative Nancy Pelosi — but the President met in the afternoon with proponents of non trade sanctions, led by Democratic Senator Max Baucus from Montana.⁴⁴

Proponents of targeted sanctions said it could work as it did in the case of South Africa. Others argued it would be very difficult because of the size of the country and the interdependence of the private and state-run sectors. As one administration official put it, "There is no halfway house in dealing with MFN."⁴⁵ Barber Conable, the past president of the World Bank also said, "You simply can't distinguish" between private and public sectors. "It's inconceivable."⁴⁶ Indeed any targeted sanctions would require monitoring thousands of Chinese enterprises and it would require vast administrative work, if not prove impossible.⁴⁷

At a debate before the National Press Club on April 19, Pelosi fought back that exports to China account for only 1.9 percent of the U.S. total. "Many who oppose conditioning MFN for China characterize this debate as one of values vs. jobs," Pelosi continued. "They are wrong. It is better characterized as a debate about ideals vs. deals."⁴⁸

An article of San Francisco Chronicle had given some statistical support for Pelosi. "If China were to lose MFN status, its drive for economic modernization would suffer a big setback because the United States has emerged as its single export market. China's trade surplus with the United States is now the second biggest that any nation has with America, trailing only that of Japan." It also reported. "China's trade performance with the United States contrasts sharply with its overall trade pattern. As China's booming economy sucks in imports, it runs a wide trade deficit."⁴⁹ Chinese "don't like democracy," Pelosi said on a different occasion, "but they love hard currency, and they need it very badly."⁵⁰

On the other hand, an aggressive lobbying campaign by U.S. business continued in order to renew China's trade privileges. Indeed a rupture in trade relations that would trigger retaliation by China could cost jobs in key electoral states. In April, a group representing 400 California businesses warned Clinton of a potential loss of 35,000 jobs. Business lobbyists also pressed House members such as Jim McDermott, Democratic Representative from Washington, whose district was home for thousands of Boeing Co. workers whose jobs would be jeopardized in a U.S.-China trade war. In early May, he helped produce a letter signed by 106 colleagues calling for MFN renewal.⁵¹ An industry-sponsored study concluded that termination of favorable trade relations with China would cost American consumers \$10 billion a year. Free-traders held that to demand that the Chinese adhere to American standards of freedom smacked of imperialism.⁵²

As June 3, the due date for MFN renewal for China approached, an intensive and sometimes fractious debate within the administration, over what steps to take - and how - continued every day. In assessing China's human rights record over the past year, Secretary of State Warren Christopher reported to Clinton that China had made progress in allowing emigration and had begun complying with an agreement for investigations into the use of prison labor in making Chinese goods. But Christopher also concluded that the Chinese had not made progress in complying with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in providing an acceptable accounting for political and religious prisoners and in treating them humanely. He also found no change in China's repression of Tibet and no end to China's jamming broadcasts by the Voice of America.⁵³

In fact, facing these realities, the administration's ambitions to change China had been deflated by that time. Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord said in a Senate hearing, "We are not seeking to transform Chinese society." Another senior official told, "We are not trying to change Chinese society overnight."⁵⁴

Since China made only little progress in her human rights situation, at one point, the President leaned toward extending the trade privileges, but putting sanctions on a range of military-made products. The Treasury and Defense departments, however, vehemently objected and indeed, from the outset, the President's economic advisers argued that trade and human rights should not be linked.⁵⁹

On May 26, Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen recalled before the press how previous administrations' attempts to punish other countries with commerce ended up benefiting competitors. "I watched when (President Jimmy) Carter tried to stop selling wheat to the Russians and the business went to the Australians and the Canadians," he also said, "I watched when (President Ronald) Reagan tried to stop construction of (a natural gas) pipeline in Russia and Caterpillar almost went down the tubes." "Indeed Germany, Japan and other nations were in line to sweep up any China business the United States rejected." "More and more, we find that economics is a major point in foreign affairs," Bentsen argued, "That's going to accelerate."⁶⁰ In fact, after hard-won efforts to pass the North American Free Trade Agreement and negotiate the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, it was difficult for Clinton to restrict trade.⁶¹

Finally, on May 27th, President Clinton announced to reverse course on China and renewed its trade privileges, despite what he said was Beijing's lack of significant progress on human rights. "I think we have to see our relations with China within a broader context" than simply human rights, Clinton said, adding that the link between rights and trade was no longer tenable. "We have reached the end of the usefulness of that policy." Clinton admitted he had a change of heart. "Let me ask you the same question I have asked myself," he said. "Will we do more to advance the cause of human rights if China is isolated."⁶²

At 12:30 on May 26th, one day before the President's announcement, Pelosi received a call from the White House. She knew it would be bad news. In a candid, 50-minute phone conversation, Clinton explained of his policy change to Pelosi. "I am an enthusiastic Democrat." Pelosi confessed to the press after the telephone conversation. "But I cannot say one thing about George Bush's policy and another about Bill Clinton's when they are the same policy."⁶³

An article in *The Washington Post* on May 31 skillfully depicted Clinton's decision: "Clinton has given up our claim to be unique among nations, as privileged and blessed but with official compassion for the less fortunate. Clinton loved the idea. It's just the execution that is beyond him. What he seems to be saying is that we cannot afford human rights."

A comment by Pelosi sounded more ironic, "The Chinese think money is everything with us."⁶⁴

Conclusion

Although a single case teaches only limited truths, our investigation on the United States' attempt to improve the human rights situation in China clearly shows the limits of American foreign policy to alter the outside world.

The US government did not implement a strong and consistent human rights policy with regard to China partly because there was not a national consensus in the United States. Human rights advocates such as Nancy Pelosi, for example, had a hard time gaining enough Congressional support to overrule Presidential vetoes. Divisions of opinions between the White House and the Congress and/or between business and human

rights organizations, come from the fact that, unlike during the Cold War era, they can no longer work together for one concrete purpose, such as the fight against communism.

Another reason why the US government was not able to maintain a strong human rights policy toward China was that other policy considerations constrained administrations from achieving human rights goals. The opening of the China market after 1978 made the relations with China the fastest growing bilateral trade relations for the U.S. Both the Bush and Clinton administrations feared that if they pushed Beijing too hard on human rights, it might destructively affect the economic relations between the two nations. In the Post-Cold War era, the American impulse to spread its own human right values seems sometimes to contradict with American economic interests.

In his first Presidential year, Clinton, along with Congressional human rights advocates, tried to link human right demands against China with the bilateral economic relations through fixing conditions to MFN renewal. But, rather than being effective, the linkage policy disclosed its limit in the end. The linkage approach was taken partly because, regardless of Republican or Democratic administration, military options were out of question from the outset. Unlike Serbia, China was too big and too strong. There was virtually no feasibility of military success and the cost of taking such an option would be enormous. Therefore the government did not even discuss the possibility of using military means. In short, the linkage with economic relations was as far as the US government could go for improving human rights conditions in China. But Clinton was unable to maintain even “the modest option.”

Pelosi was correct when she declared that her fight with opponents was “characterized as a debate about ideals vs. deals.” She was defeated because of just that.

Notes

- 1 This paper is expanded and revised from the original presentation by the author at the international symposium, entitled “From Americanization to Japanization,” at Rikkyo University in 1996.
- 2 “U.S. not ready to lift China sanctions, official says,” in *The Japan Times*, October 5, 1989.
- 3 David Hoffman and Hobart Rowen, “Quayle Sees ‘Dividends’ From U.S. China Policy” in *The Washington Post*, January 11, 1990, p. a26.
- 4 Marc Sandalow, “Human Rights Before Trade Pelosi’s High-Stakes Stance on China” in *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 9, 1994, page A1.
- 5 Ann Devroy and David Hoffman, “White House Reveals Earlier China Mission; President Accuses Panama of Harassing U.S.,” in *The Washington Post*, December 19, 1989, p. a1.
- 6 Tom Kenworthy and Ann Devroy, “House Votes to Reject Chinese-Student Veto; Senate Vote Today Expected to Be Close.” in *The Washington Post*, January 25, 1990, p. a1.
- 7 Andrew Rosenthal, “Bush Says China Should Retain Trade Privilege President’s Announcement Surprises Staff— Congress Concerned Over Beijing Rights Record,” in *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 16, 1991, p. A1.
- 8 Lena H. Sun and David Hoffman, “President Is Ready to Renew China’s Favored Trade Status,” in *The Washington Post*, May 22, 1990, p. a1.
- 9 Mary McGrory, “Turning up Heat on China, Bush.” in *The Washington Post*, May 22, 1990, p. a2. Also the editorial of Asahi Shimbun, May 26, 1990.
- 10 Andrew Rosenthal, “Bush Says China Should Retain Trade Privilege President’s

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 - 27 *Asahi Shimbun*, June 3, 1992, p. 2. As an indication of the administration’s sensitivity on the China issue, the White House, which had received the State Department’s paperwork for the renewal more than a week ago, held up its announcement until the evening of a busy news day dominated by the California primary. “Bush Renews China Trade Status White House Cites Concern for Business — Some Lawmakers Incensed,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 3, 1992, p. A20.
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