China Foreign Policy Essay, Research Paper

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Since the initial warming of U.S.-China relations in the early 1970’s, policymakers have had difficulty balancing conflicting U.S. policy concerns in the People’s Republic of China. In the strange world of diplomacy between the two, nothing is predictable. From Nixon to Clinton, presidents have had to reconcile security and human rights concerns with the corporate desire for expanded economic relations between the two countries. Nixon established ties with Mao Zedong’s brutal regime in 1972. And today Clinton’s administration is trying to influence China’s course from within a close economic and diplomatic relationship.

In 1989 the Tiananmen Square Massacre drew public attention to the inconsistent character of U.S.-China policy. There was a public outcry for a stronger stance against human rights violations. Weapons exported to China were prohibited. Nuclear energy cooperation ceased and Overseas Private Investment Corporation and Trade Development Agency assistance programs were suspended.

There are three major problems with the current U.S. Policy towards China. The first, is that neither existing sanctions or comprehensive engagement has resulted in human rights improvements. Next, measures adopted following Tiananmen Square are limited and in some cases not fully implemented. And finally, despite it’s failure to respect human rights, China is the largest recipient of World Bank Funds.

Under pressure to integrate human rights concerns more closely into overall U.S.-China policy, Washington has adopted a number of sanctions including restrictions on aid. The Clinton administration has argued that increased economic integration of China into the world market is the best way to advance human rights.

Chinese human rights practices continue to fall far below internationally accepted standards. Neither the existing U.S. sanctions nor the policy of comprehensive engagement has resulted in human rights improvements.

Now, the United States is trying a number of different plans that are supposed to slowly cause human rights reforms in China. However, these are limited and in some cases not fully implemented. Although OPIC and TDA programs were suspended, other agencies remained. This sends a mixed message to China about the seriousness of the United States.

Following the massacre, the U.S. and other nations put a moratorium on new World Bank lending to China. In 1990, the policy was relaxed. The U.S. government has not used its influence at the World Bank to pressure China into improving its human rights practices. In Burma, human rights practices are basically the same as in China. For Burma, the United States endorses a ban on all World Bank lending. In voting for China projects, the United States usually abstains, allowing projects to proceed.

Most Favored Nation status means a country’s exports to the U.S. fall under the most common U.S. tariff schedule. In 1994, China’s MFN was delinked from its human rights issues. To try and compensate, the Clinton administration announced the creation of a special human rights program that included promises of increased Radio Free Asia broadcasts to Asia, new support for NGO’s working in China and the formulation of a corporate code of conduct for companies doing business in China. The program has only been partially implemented and exerts little pressure on China. It is not an effective substitute for a tougher U.S. stance on human rights violations.

Trade and investment concerns have knocked U.S.-China policy out of balance. Despite expressions of concern for human rights conditions, the U.S. government has allowed narrow economic interests, particularly those of corporate investors, to guide its China policy. Although the U.S. government has let it be known that human rights improvements would be welcome, it has been unwilling to jeopardize U.S. economic relations by adopting stricter human rights conditionally on aid and trade.