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Trends. Humane and Inhumane Rights: President Clinton's Trip to China

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Human rights advocates have largely attacked President Clinton's performance in China as one that variously exacerbated, paid lip service to, discounted, and/or ignored the violations of his hosts. Talk about economics, international security, or the environment was time away from human rights. Talk about human rights was not talk enough. Talking enough about human rights was not action, e.g., sanctions. Any sanctions considered, already implemented or merely discussed were not strong enough.

The above cacophony of human rights complaints does not acknowledge that economic, security, and environmental progress can positively affect and also constitute human rights--or that a foreign policy based solely on morality is the luxury only of the most materially privileged, other worldly, or clinically suspect whose very status renders morality moot. The cacophony also does not acknowledge that talk about human rights can lead to positive changes independent of how much or how loud the talk is. And the cacophony does not address that talk itself is an action and even if it were not--in the words of classical Chinese strategists--a nonaction can speak for the human rights advocates attacking President Clinton, only the most severe sanctions will do. In this--seeking the worst for those with whom they disagree--these advocates (foreign devils to some Chinese) are very much like the stereotypes of Chinese leaders whom these advocates demonize. In the service of the most humane--freedom, liberty, dignity, fraternity, equality, some glorious future perfection--only the most inhumane will do. Morton Abramowitz, former chief of the United States State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, may have been close to the mark when he stated (as cited by Erlanger) that "The critics seem to want him [Clinton] to go there and start a war." (See An open letter to President Clinton. (June 21, 1998). Human Rights in China; Arnhart, L. (1984). Darwin, Aristotle, and the biology of human rights. *Social Sciences Information*, 23,, 493-521; Erlanger, S. (June 29, 1998). Clinton critics say he didn't go far enough. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Good job, President Clinton-Now follow it up. (June 28, 1998). Human Rights Watch, <http://www.hrw.org>; Jennings, T.E. (1996). The developmental dialectic of international human rights advocacy. *Political Psychology*, 17, 77-95; Rogers, R.S. & Kitzinger, C. (1986). Human rights: Bedrock or mosaic? *Operant Subjectivity*, 9, 123-130; Staerkle, C., Clemence, A., & Doise, W. (1998). Representation of human rights across different national contexts: The role of democratic and non-democratic populations and governments. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 28, 207-226.) (Keywords: China, Clinton, Human Rights, People's Republic of China, Sanctions, United States.)