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Trends. The People's Republic of China and Permanent Normal Trading Relations: A Run-Up and Aftermath of More Smoke than Fire?

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

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The United States (US) House of Representatives has voted 237-197 to approve permanent normal trading relations (PNTR) with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Amidst all the hoopla and suspense leading up to the vote and its aftermath, it appears that little is really changing.

The yearly ordeal of Congress passing on a normal trading status for the PRC has always resulted in awarding such status regardless of peaks and valleys of various PRC atrocities, human rights violations, and bellicose acts and statements. The ordeal seemed to have little effect on PRC behavior even as it allowed US Congressional narcissistic gratification, grandstanding, politicking, venting, and catharsis. Alleged economic benefits for the US may be circumvented by PRC impediments that are not violations in the eyes of the World Trade Organization. Future openings towards democracy in the PRC may well have occurred in any event. Alleged international security shortfalls in the event of the US Congress disapproving PNTR for the PRC seem to have been vastly overblown. And the notion that the vote had all the import of some "one-time only event" was just plain wrong, because there'll be a new US Congress and new US Presidential administration in just a few months.

What has been and is of significance is the plethora of unsubstantiated causal attributions concerning how to modify human rights violations and influence environmental and labor concerns as well as other security and proliferation issues. Noteworthy as well have been the myriad assertions of a US global efficacy beyond the wildest fantasies of those who strive to play God. Behind both have been the oldest and commonest variants of selfish and special interests that subvert any attempt to comprehensively analyze the short-term and long-term pros and cons of PNTR. While there has been a voting victory and defeat, human welfare may neither have won nor lost. (See Cioffi-Revilla, C. (1999). Origins and age of deterrence: Comparative research on Old World and New World systems. *Cross-Cultural Research: The Journal of Comparative Social Science*, 33, 239-264; Emmendorfer, J. L., & Crosbie, J. (1999). Effects of punishment proportion and condition sequence on contrast and induction with humans. *Psychological Record*, 49, 261-271; Harvey, F.P. (1999). Practicing coercion: Revisiting successes and failures using boolean logic and comparative methods. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 43, 840-871; Schmitt, E., & Kahn, J. (May 25, 2000). House in 237-197 vote, approves normal trade rights for China. *The New York Times*, p. A1, A10; Trivizas, E., & Smith, P. T. (1997). The deterrent effect of terrorist incidents on the rates of luggage theft in railway and underground. *British Journal of Criminology*, 37, 63-74.) (Keywords: Human Rights, People's Republic of China, Trade, United States.)