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## CHINA'S DEMOCRACY CRACKDOWN DEMANDS A PRESIDENTIAL RESPONSE

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At the end of his trip to China from June 25 to July 3, 1998, U.S. President Bill Clinton praised the Chairman of China's Communist Party, Jiang Zemin, as a visionary and the right leader at the right time for China. Unfortunately, within six months of this statement, the same leader President Clinton had praised began the most systematic crackdown on organized dissent in China since the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. In his January 19, 1999, State of the Union Address, President Clinton noted, "In China last year, I said to the leaders and the people what I'd like to say again tonight: Stability can no longer be bought at the expense of liberty." Regrettably, China's leadership has not been listening. What President Clinton plans to do to change this disregard for liberty remains unclear.

During a Christmas Eve address, Jiang Zemin warned that "any factors that could jeopardize our stability must be annihilated in the early stages." Putting these words into action, the government of the People's Republic of China sentenced the key organizers of the Chinese Democracy Party to prison terms ranging from 11 years to 13 years. These party leaders had merely called on members to organize and formally establish a political party, a move that strictly followed China's rigid framework of laws and regulations. Their imprisonment calls into question not only the legitimacy of China's current government, but also the credibility of the Clinton Administration's policy that seeks to establish a "constructive strategic partnership" with such a government.

### MISTAKING APPEARANCES FOR REALITY

During his trip to China, President Clinton specifically called on China's leadership to release all remaining political prisoners and expand the experiments in democracy already taking place in villages throughout China. China's government committed to signing the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights at that time. The capstone of the summit was a nationwide live broadcast of the joint press conference as the two Presidents emerged from their discussions, a move that was meant to show China in a new light to the world, to shrug off the burden of the Tiananmen Square massacre, and to demonstrate confidence in the government in Beijing.

At the time, it seemed to many in the Clinton Administration and the U.S. media that the government in Beijing really had changed. Beijing acknowledged by agreeing to sign the U.N.

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covenant that some human rights standards are universal—and not dependent on culture and level of development. China's state-controlled media even broadcast live statements by President Clinton challenging China's leaders to make their political system more competitive and free.

Unfortunately, what seemed a success last June appears now an equally dramatic disappointment. China has not released political prisoners, but arrested more. Even after signing, on October 5, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, China's government is carrying out the systematic destruction of organized dissent. And instead of emerging from the shadows of Tiananmen Square, the Beijing government is creating a new generation of martyrs in China's long march toward democracy.

### TIME FOR ACTION

This dramatic change in Beijing in word and deed calls into question the effectiveness of President Clinton's engagement policy and his desire to establish a "constructive strategic partnership" with China. The alternative to the President's policy is not isolation and containment, but an engagement founded on more than mere words. If high rhetoric on democracy is to have any credibility, it must be matched with action to reward and protect progress toward democracy, and action to protest and punish attacks on democracy.

To promote and defend democracy in China, the Clinton Administration should:

- **Condemn China's violation of human rights covenants at the U.N.** China's recent action to dismantle the Chinese Democracy Party and imprison its leaders violates rights protected under China's own 1982 constitution and the just-signed International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Although China's government has relaxed many controls, after 20 years of reform it has made no progress toward tolerating organized dissent. The United States cannot credibly advocate democracy and the protection of human rights if it turns a blind eye toward these developments. The most appropriate

forum for registering strong objection to the crackdown on democracy is at the next meeting of the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva, Switzerland, in March and April 1999.

- **Strengthen democracy-promoting activities.** Organizations like the National Endowment for Democracy, the Voice of America, and Radio Free Asia work hard to promote political freedom in China. They should receive greater recognition and financial support. In addition, many non-governmental organizations are working to improve living conditions and human rights in China. President Clinton and Members of Congress should make every effort to speak to these groups, participate in their events, publicize as widely as possible their good work, and encourage other concerned Americans to participate in their efforts.
- **Promote Taiwan's democracy in China and abroad.** To advocate democracy on the Chinese mainland credibly, the United States must properly recognize and reward the people of Taiwan for their success in establishing a vibrant democracy; they deserve better than a well-armed cold shoulder from Beijing and exile from the international community. Taiwan should be held up as an example of what free people can achieve in a Chinese society. The United States should make clear that democracy allows for the free and open debate of controversial views—even independence. It should not view such a debate as just cause for military intimidation by China.

Because President Clinton publicly heaped such premature and overly generous praise on the Chinese leader who now is calling for the annihilation of dissent, it should be President Clinton who represents the United States in issuing a strong response. He should publicly explain to the American people and Congress how his Administration will respond to such an affront to his personal diplomacy and policy.

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