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## **PUT REFORM BEFORE REWARD AT THE CHINA SUMMIT**

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Premier Zhu Rongji, the second most powerful official in China's government, is scheduled to arrive in the United States on April 6 for an eight-day visit. At the heart of this visit is a summit with President Bill Clinton in Washington, beginning April 8. Zhu's priority will be promoting China's membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Clinton Administration should have a three-part agenda: conveying the growing dismay of the United States with China's actions in the areas of security and human rights and informing China that it must demonstrate its commitment to the goals of the WTO by producing clear results before any deal over WTO membership will be made.

### **GROWING TENSIONS**

Zhu will arrive in the United States at a time in which the level of distrust between the two governments is higher than at any time since President Richard Nixon began the process of normalizing diplomatic relations with China in 1972. China views U.S. efforts to condemn its human rights abuses before the United Nations (U.N.) Human Rights Commission in Geneva, Switzerland, develop and deploy missile defense systems in Asia, upgrade security relations with Japan, and assist Taiwan with self-defense as attacks on China's sovereignty. Further, China opposes the intervention of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Kosovo, viewing it as an ominous precedent for U.S. involvement in any future conflict over Taiwan.

Since the President's much-celebrated trip to China in June 1998, China's actions have undermined the image of the country as a place of great positive change and opportunity that President Clinton painstakingly projected during his trip. China has engaged in the most systematic crack-down on organized dissent since the Tiananmen Square massacre 10 years ago. The U.S. Department of Defense has reported a substantial buildup of Chinese missiles amassed in the region opposite Taiwan. China denounced U.S. efforts to develop national and theater missile defense systems and threatened to retaliate if the United States shared such systems with Taiwan or Japan. Perhaps most damaging to the notion of a strategic partnership are recent allegations of China's theft of nuclear secrets from top-secret U.S. labs.

The Clinton Administration's diplomatic objective, as stated by Kenneth Lieberthal, the President's special assistant for Asian affairs, on March 30 is to

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bring about China's "constructive participation in the international community in partnership with Washington." Administration officials say the United States needs China's cooperation in order to resolve the Asian financial crisis, to ensure peace on the Korean peninsula, to avoid tension and crisis in the Taiwan Strait, and to make the WTO an effective and truly global institution.

## TIME FOR FIRMNESS

Judging by the Clinton Administration's agenda, it is unclear whether either government fully appreciates the tense political environment in which this summit will take place. Under current circumstances, this summit is likely to be more an airing of views than meeting of minds. Any announced breakthrough or agreement will be met with skepticism and intense scrutiny. Instead of trying to make deals on subjects like the WTO, the Administration should:

- **Seek China's cooperation on issues of importance to U.S. security.** For example, the Clinton Administration should make clear its resolve to develop and deploy an effective missile defense system, emphasizing that deployment of a system to protect innocent civilians against missile attack cannot legitimately be considered a threat to China's security. Consistent with U.S. commitments under the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act and with China's stated aim of seeking peaceful reunification with Taiwan, the Administration should seek a commitment from Zhu that China will renounce the use of force against Taiwan. The Administration also should seek China's commitment to use its diplomatic leverage to encourage positive changes in North Korea's military, diplomatic, or domestic behavior.
- **Insist that China demonstrate market-opening reforms before agreeing to support its entry into the WTO.** The reforms China must make to conform with WTO standards also will facilitate its long-term economic development and international competitiveness. This is in China's own self-interest. The WTO would be weakened if it brought in a major economy whose practices were not consistent with WTO

objectives. The Clinton Administration also should convince China of the need to support Taiwan's bid to join the WTO. This gesture would build confidence in the cross-Strait relationship. Because the WTO does not require sovereignty for membership, this would not violate China's opposition to Taiwan's membership in state-based international organizations.

- **Hold China to the letter and spirit of its international human rights commitments.** China has signed, but not yet ratified, two U.N. human rights covenants on civil and political rights and on economic, social, and cultural rights. Beijing's recent crackdown on the China Democratic Party and its ongoing interference in religious affairs are inconsistent with these U.N. covenants and China's own constitution. The Clinton Administration should defend its decision to condemn such behavior at the U.N. Human Rights Commission and should urge China to release all prisoners of conscience and protect the right of its people to express dissenting views. In meetings with Zhu, President Clinton should praise Taiwan's example of successful democratization that produced greater stability through increased political and economic freedom.

The United States has great interest in deterring aggression and promoting freedom throughout Asia. But to advance these goals, the Clinton Administration needs to see results. Actions speak louder than words, and fresh promises from China are no substitute for real reform. Unfortunately, the President's China policy emphasizes cooperation over results. This summit offers the President an opportunity to adjust course by insisting that China's reforms come before its reward—membership in the WTO. Because Premier Zhu's visit will be more an opportunity to exchange views than a forum for grand policy, President Clinton needs to get the message right. Promises do not a partnership make. Progress toward peace and freedom is the foundation of a meaningful engagement.

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