

Who cares about human rights when the world needs China so badly

Written by MikeinTaipei

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Even after the administration of US president George W. Bush realized it needed China's help to combat international terrorism, launch an invasion of Iraq and deal with the North Korean nuclear issue, Washington continued to openly criticize Beijing on human rights. Tone down the criticism it certainly did, but criticism nevertheless remained.

Now, one could question the Bush administration's own record on human rights and argue that, by contrast, the administration of US President Barack Obama is faring better in that domain, with some improvements on the Iraq front, the CIA interrogation program and the Guantanamo Bay detention center. Given this, one would expect that Washington with Obama in office would be more critical of Beijing's human rights record, especially as it hasn't improved since Bush left office, and quite possibly has worsened.

Statements by US officials, however, show that this hasn't happened. Arguably, though the US' need for China's acquiescence on the "war on terror" and Iraq may have diminished somewhat, new problems — predominantly the global financial crisis — added to lingering ones, such as global warming, AIDS, swine flu and North Korea, appear to have convinced US officials that criticism on human rights should remain minimal.



Nothing made this clearer than a statement by US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, who during an address in Washington honoring Wu Bangguo (吴邦国), chairman of the rubber-stamp Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, did her utmost to highlight the need for greater cooperation between the US and China on a slew of challenges.

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“The relationship between our two countries has the potential to chart a brighter course, not just for our own nations and peoples, but indeed for the entire world,” Clinton said, adding that Beijing and Washington have had “productive exchanges on issues ranging from the global economic crisis to climate change to poverty and disease to the security threats that confront us.”

Tellingly, the American Institute in Taiwan’s Electronic Information Service’s Highlights on Foreign Policy and International Relations, to which I subscribe, did not once mention references that Clinton may have made to human rights in China. Only the full transcript of her speech showed that Clinton did not ignore the issue altogether.

“We have different histories, different experiences, different perspectives,” Clinton is quoted as saying. “But we must seek to talk honestly and openly even when agreement is not possible. And we are committed to doing so. In July, we had a very full and frank discussion about human rights, and we agreed to hold the next round of our Human Rights Dialogue before the end of the year, and to reconvene the US-China Legal Experts Dialogue. We know that this is an important part of our engagement with China.”

This passage, which does not even openly criticize China on human rights, is the only reference to the matter in Clinton’s entire address

. (Not a single mention, meanwhile, was made of China’s continued arms buildup, or Taiwan.) In fact, one reading could argue that Clinton appears to be embracing, or at least not criticizing, the view that human rights do not apply in Asia or in China. In fact, her choice of words appears custom-made to reflect remarks Wu made in March this year that “The Western model of a legal system cannot be copied mechanically in establishing our own,” which basically meant that China would never develop into a Western-style democracy and would emphasize the primacy of the “path of socialism with Chinese characteristics.”

At best, the US has a “disagreement” with China, based on “different histories,” “different experiences” and “different perspectives.” As long as the universality of human rights is not stated clearly by the US, China will be able to deflect criticism and make a case for “exceptional circumstances” that allow it to continue to repress minorities, dissidents, free speech, religious organizations and neighbors alike, while threatening stability in certain countries it conducts business with, such as Myanmar, Sudan, Zimbabwe and many others.

So much for “chart[ing] a brighter course, not just for our own nations and peoples, but indeed for the entire world.”

Source: [The Far-Eastern Sweet Potato](#)