

# The Bucks Stop Here

A couple of months ago, House majority whip Tom DeLay gave a powerful speech decrying the Clinton administration's appeasement of China, and making a strong case for a much tougher policy toward Beijing. Now, the same Tom DeLay is working night and day to help Clinton cement his "legacy" by passing permanent trade status for China. DeLay, of course, insists there is no contradiction. Borrowing the woolly-headed, utopian arguments usually deployed by Clinton and his national security adviser, Sandy Berger, DeLay claims trading with China will transform that brutal dictatorship into a model of democracy.

We have too high an opinion of the majority whip to think that he really believes this. Tom DeLay would not have suggested during the Cold War that granting the Soviet Union permanent most-favored-nation status was sound strategy. Like Ronald Reagan, most conservatives understood that enriching the Soviet government would only allow it to purchase more weapons. Is there any doubt today that China will use some of its increasing wealth to buy advanced weapons from cash-starved Russia and build up its nuclear and conventional forces?

Nor does DeLay believe that trading with Cuba and Iraq is the best way to bring down Fidel Castro and Saddam Hussein. Last week, as DeLay was twisting Republican arms to win PNTR for China, he argued against a proposal that would lift sanctions against the sale of agricultural and medical products to Cuba and other rogue states. Here's DeLay: "When I pick between support of freedom and making a buck, I'm going to pick freedom." But when it comes to China, many Republicans are choosing to make a buck.

Republican party strategists have made no secret of their hope that supporting PNTR will give them a leg up in their competition with the Democrats for corporate contributions, especially from the high-tech, insurance, and finance industries. They're salivating at the prospect that House Democrats will fail to rally around their president—it's ironic that Democrats are less eager to help Clinton than Republicans—and that they will be able to

convince big business that only Republicans can be trusted to look after their wallets when it comes to China.

This may be good business, and perhaps it's good politics—although polls consistently show the public, and Republicans especially, less than enthusiastic about the trade deal with China. But it is incoherent national security policy. If China is the challenge to American interests that DeLay rightly claims it is, then how can it make sense to grant Beijing permanent and therefore irrevocable trading status? Would it not be wiser to adopt a more skeptical approach, to keep American

options open, to take things one year at a time? Shouldn't Republicans at least insist on strengthening the defense relationship with our friends in Taiwan first? Shouldn't they insist on responsible behavior from Beijing on weapons proliferation and the like? Doesn't national security trump commerce?

Republicans who plan to vote for PNTR in their eagerness to court corporate donors should keep something in mind. At some point after

they cast their vote—maybe it will be a matter of months, maybe a matter of days—China will do something offensive. Maybe the Beijing government will murder some more Falun Gong supporters; maybe it will massacre some labor protesters; maybe it will launch some more missiles in the direction of Taiwan.

Republicans with long memories may recall the contra aid debates of the 1980s. The Democratic party would defeat aid to the contras, and Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega would promptly head off to Moscow, causing embarrassment for those decent, if misguided, Democrats who had been taken in. In fact, there was no reason to be surprised by Ortega's going to Moscow: The Sandinistas were just being themselves. Well today, Republicans can count on the fact that the Chinese Communists will similarly be true to themselves. And then, decent, if misguided, Republicans will regret their credulity. Is the GOP now to become the party of trusting naiveté in foreign policy? Is it really worth the money?

—William Kristol and Robert Kagan

*When forced to pick between national security and making a buck, many Republicans are choosing to make a buck.*