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Final Deliverable

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TENURE OF FORMER DRL ASSISTANT SECRETARY JOHN SHATTUCK

John Shattuck served as DRL Assistant Secretary from 1993 to 1998. During his tenure, he responded to simultaneous crises in Rwanda, Haiti, Bosnia, China and other “human rights battle zones” where the upheavals were most intense (Shattuck, 2003). These conflicts were characterized by unprecedented attacks on civilians, with hundreds of thousands of people victimized by genocide and repressive regimes. In this post-Cold War climate, the challenge was finding ways to stop or prevent these conflicts without using military intervention. These cases highlighted the contrasting imperatives contained in then-candidate Clinton’s campaign promises: to promote human rights while simultaneously advancing U.S. interests and reducing U.S. military engagements abroad. Satisfying the former in the face of the latter was a challenge Shattuck struggled to fulfil.

CHINA

Several months before Shattuck’s 1993 confirmation, President Clinton promulgated an executive order that would link China’s most-favored-nation (MFN) status with significant improvements in human rights. Clinton promised that, unlike previous administrations, his would promote both human rights and trade liberalization with China. Shattuck was newly confirmed when he was tasked with implementing this policy.

The executive order received universal accolades from human rights groups and congressional leaders in the United States, as it appealed to China to make significant progress on human rights, including by releasing and accounting for political prisoners, curbing the use of prison labor, permitting international broadcasting into China, and allowing access to China’s prisons for international humanitarian organizations like the Red Cross.

During the year that followed, Shattuck travelled to Beijing to negotiate the MFN strategy and to conduct thorough assessments of China’s human rights performance. As massive investments flowed into China, Shattuck was under immense pressure to report inflated assessments of progress by American business elites and other supporters of MFN. For its part, the government of China refused to cooperate with Shattuck’s mission. Instead of imposing sanctions and not renewing MFN status, President Clinton announced in 1994 that he was revoking his executive order and delinking trade with improvements in Beijing’s human rights record. Shattuck considered this a devastating failure and considering resigning from his position, as he thought the administration had only made a rhetorical commitment to promoting human rights.

RWANDA

From April 7th until July 1994, the world watched as 800,000 people were brutally murdered in Rwanda. The Clinton administration remained paralyzed, at first failing to comprehend the scale of the atrocity,

and then, when they did, not wanting to intervene so as to prevent a repeat of the killing of 18 U.S. troops in Mogadishu, Somalia in 1993.

During this time, Shattuck embarked on several diplomatic trips to Africa, meeting with heads of state from Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda and Burundi to discuss practical and immediate steps to address the Rwandan crisis. Upon returning, Shattuck drafted a memorandum addressed the Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, pleading for the U.S. government to provide support for a UN peacekeeping operation. Shattuck also advocated for the creation of an international tribunal to investigate the crimes committed by Hutu extremists and to provide humanitarian assistance to the growing number of refugees. Shattuck's pleas were heard by Congress. They were staunchly opposed to military intervention, but they did authorize providing military logistical support for international refugee agencies in surrounding countries.

Shattuck reports that the mood in the State Department was grim. Ultimately, Shattuck laments on the failure of the international system to respond to one of the worst human rights atrocities in recorded history.

HAITI

The Clinton administration was wary of any diplomatic venture that required the support of U.S. armed forces. But because of its proximity to the United States, the Haitian crises prompted a different response from Washington. The dilemma facing the administration was how to peacefully remove the military dictator and restore a democratically elected president to power. There were also debates about whether "Haitian boat people" were economic or political refugees and whether the administration was violating international humanitarian law by forcing the refugees to return to Haiti. This became an early test of President Clinton's campaign-trail commitments to promoting human rights.

To better assess the situation on the ground, Shattuck made significant improvements in human rights reporting, not only in Haiti but across all of the U.S. embassies. He recommended that ambassadors designate specific human rights officers at each of the embassies, and in 1993, Shattuck authorized DRL to conduct the final editorial reviews of embassy human rights reports. Using the 1993 Report and observations made from nongovernmental organizations, Shattuck called for a policy review on Haitian refugees. His main argument being that it was political repression, and not poverty, that forced Haitians out.

Through a series of successive negotiations, the Clinton administration would eventually use force to dispose of the military junta and to peacefully restore Aristide to power. This doctrine of diplomacy backed by force would be used again to respond to crises in Bosnia, Kosovo and East Timor.

COMMENTS

John Shattuck's tenure has taught me one of many things. Principally, that DRL priorities matter when those priorities align with the U.S. interest. This is exemplified by the policy response to linking China's MFN status with human rights. Human rights could not stand up to the billions of dollars in investments and exports that deepening trade ties were unleashing. As a result, Clinton abandoned the linkage entirely.

I also learned that victories require cultivated alliances within and across bureaus. Shattuck succeeded in advancing certain causes when he had strong allies, notably Secretary of State Warren Christopher. His pleas that the United States intervene in Rwanda and accept refugees from Haiti were made alone, without the high-level backing necessary to mobilize a truly interagency response to these crises.