Should the U.S. prohibit trade with countries that have poor records on human rights?

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**Should the U.S. prohibit trade with countries that have poor records on human rights? Thesis Statement**

The purpose of this research paper is to determine if the U.S. should prohibit trade with countries that have poor records on human rights? One reason that this topic interests me is that I recently took a trip to Cuba and got a chance to interact with the citizens and see a little bit of what life is like for them during a trade embargo that has been placed on them by the United States. Although many may agree that blocking trade is a good strategy to help alleviate the poor treatment of foreign citizens by their own governments, it is amazing how much additional suffering that is placed on those citizens when the blocks are in effect. After reviewing my research, it will be clear that even though there are reported successful results of trade embargos, it does not do enough to steer poor treatment away from those harmed and we must use different measures than blocking trade if we wish to improve the poor treatment of citizens of foreign countries

**My Audience**

Let’s look at the most effected members of the trade embargos in my audience. The citizens of countries that the US prohibits trade with due to poor human rights, are mostly affected. This group is largely affected, because they are missing out on many benefits and funding that could be afforded to them if there was no block on trade.

Another audience that I am reaching out to are people that have escaped one of these blocked countries and are currently living in the US. These people are known to be for the trade block and against the trade blocks depending on political views and the status of family members that have been left behind. These people have no decision-making power in those countries that are violating human rights.

A last group that is part of my audience is the leaders of the offending countries and the leaders of the United States that are putting the trade restrictions in place. I plan to give a detailed account for how these leaders are being affected and their reasons for taking such drastic measures regardless of how citizens are being affected.

**The First Problem**

The goal of the US for blocking trade on another country, is to harm the leaders of the foreign country, so they will change their policies. The idea is to entice people to see their own government as an enemy and to try to put pressure on it to change (Henderson, 2009). The problem with this is that they end up harming many innocent people on those countries. In most cases, by reducing the amount of goods available to those citizens. Also, in the case of my visit to Cuba, I understood that citizens that tried to revolt against their government could be killed. Most of those citizens are not willing to sacrifice their life to try to get their government to change.

**The Second Problem**

A second problem with blocking trade with other countries, is that it also places a burden on our allies (Should the United States Maintain Its Embargo against Cuba?, 2017). For example, the US and China work together to block trade with North Korea. China supports the block, because they rely so much on support from the United States and are considered one of our allies. But China suffers a great loss economically, since North Korea is China’s biggest exporter. So, since blocking trade involves multiple countries, we place others at risk, forcing them to honor our values and bringing them into the battle with us.

**The Third Problem**

The third problem with blocking trade is the fact that the US is losing money by not allowing businesses to trade with some of these foreign countries. For example, not long ago, a group representing 11 Midwestern state governments voted in favor of lifting the Cuba trade restrictions, which hurt the economy of this agricultural-rich region. According to them, if the restrictions were stopped, each of these states could average between $60 million to $150 million annually in additional trade (SCHEPERS, 2013).

**The Solution**

As stated earlier, the first problem that needs a solution is how to provide to aid to countries that we have a trade block with? I believe that aid should come as a package of humanitarian support, technical assistance, education funding and health care among other programs. We should do this along with relaxing some of the restrictions we placed on Cuba. If human rights violations occur at a level judged unacceptable by a donor then when practical, the donor could decide to reduce funding for certain activities that support the regime while continuing others that directly help the most vulnerable people. Australia took this approach after the most recent Fiji coup by suspending parts of the law and justice sector program (ie. assistance to the security services) but continuing the health and education programs. This could be one way of reducing the regime access to “slush funds” that concerns Easterly. The question should not be “Should we give aid to countries with questionable human rights records?” but “How can we effectively reach the most vulnerable people in countries, especially those who face human rights violations, all while not inadvertently supporting the regime in power. (Jayasuriya, 2012)” The advantage to this solution is that much needed relief can still be provided to citizens that are innocent of the charges that their government is being punished for.

**A Second Advantage**

There is a second advantage of providing humanitarian support, technical assistance, education funding and health care among other programs. The second problem mentioned above is that our allies also must suffer from not being able to trade with countries that we have place under a trade block or embargo. If we get our allies to join in on providing support for these countries they can reap some of the same benefits that we do. Also, we can lower the taxes that they are charged for providing support, to alleviate some of the lost wages that they must face from joining our stance with the trade blocks. An advantage of this is that our allies can recoup some of the lost funds they lose in joining our causes (ECONOMIC GROWTH AND TRADE, 2017).

**A Third Advantage**

The final problem facing the US when restricting trade, is that US companies lose income on goods that could be traded with these foreign countries. In providing humanitarian support, we can implement what former President Obama wanted to do back in 2014 and relieve some of that pressure by relaxing some of the restrictions we placed on Cuba. This strategy allows larger remittances and authorizes expanded trade in a small number of goods and services between the United States and the countries under restriction. The advantage of this is the American workers and businesses can reap the benefits of expanded trade agreements (Fletcher, 2014).

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