

## Dialogues and Their Implications in Sino-American Relations\*

ROBERT G. SUTTER

*This article briefly reviews the role exchanges and dialogues have played in U.S.-China relations since President Nixon's visit to China in 1972, and examines in more detail the process, significance and outlook of recent dialogues. The overall record of dialogues shows that they are important instruments in the policy "tool kit" of each side to deal with salient areas of common interests and disagreement that have broadened in scope as a result of China's rising international importance and the increasing salience of an ever wider range of issues in U.S.-Chinese relations in the 21st century. Both sides view these policy instruments positively; they serve as shock absorbers in periods of difficulty, provide the basis for actual or potential channels of informal communication in times of crisis, and promote efforts to broaden common ground in U.S.-Chinese relations. The checkered record of military exchanges is among the array of evidence showing the reality that dialogues are subservient to the respective interests of the leaders on either side. Dialogues are instruments of improved relations but they do not compel improvement, which*

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**ROBERT G. SUTTER** is Professor of Practice of International Affairs at the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University. His earlier full-time position was Visiting Professor of Asian Studies at the School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University (2001-2011). He was the Senior Specialist and Director of the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division of the Congressional Research Service. He also served as the National Intelligence Officer for East Asia and the Pacific at the U.S. Government's National Intelligence Council, and as the China Division Director at the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research. He can be reached at <sutterr@gwu.edu>.

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*at bottom is decided by policy elites in Beijing and Washington. After forty years of efforts to normalize U.S.-China relations, those elites cooperate closely on a wide range of issues but also reflect wariness toward one another that underlines important diverging interests and differences dividing the two powers.*

**KEYWORDS:** United States; China; dialogues; motives; process.

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Dialogue has been a central feature of Sino-American relations since the United States and China opened relations beginning under President Richard Nixon and Chairman Mao Zedong (毛澤東) in the early 1970s. Often broad ranging interchanges between elites in the two administrations have been complemented by legislative exchanges and interactions between other influential government and non-governmental groups. After the United States cut back a variety of government exchanges with China following the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989, the two governments eventually saw the wisdom in using a few and over time more bilateral dialogues in order to reaffirm common ground and deal constructively with differences. Dialogues developed in an ad hoc way and came to be more formally structured. The two sides focused at first on such sensitive issues as human rights, but broadened the scope to entail over 60 dialogues by the first decade of the twenty-first century, capped by the annual wide-ranging leadership exchanges seen in the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue initiated in 2009.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Overviews providing information on U.S. leaders' views include, Harry Harding, *A Fragile Relationship: The United States and China since 1972* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1992); James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Knopf, 1999); David M. Lampton, *Same Bed, Different Dreams: Managing US-China Relations, 1989-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Jean Garrison, *Making China Policy: From Nixon to G. W. Bush* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2005); Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Strait Talk: United States-Taiwan Relations and the Crisis with China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009); Robert G. Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations: Perilous Past, Pragmatic Present* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010); Michael Swaine, *America's Challenge: Engaging a Rising China in the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011). For Chinese perspectives, see Ping Huang et al., "China-U.S. Relations: Tending towards Maturity," *The International Spectator* 44, no. 2 (June 2009): 9-16;

The explicit motives of the two administrations in pursuing dialogues during the past two decades were similar to earlier rationales. The exchanges were seen to help to deal with and hopefully reduce differences and gaps in interests and perceptions that divided the two countries. Some of these differences remained very sensitive and needed careful management through close leadership attention, notably during deliberations in the dialogues. American leaders and other elites at times articulated the view that American persuasiveness in the dialogues, backed by the forces of modern globalization and other circumstances, would help to persuade Chinese leaders to follow policies in line with U.S.-supported norms. Chinese leaders generally were more circumspect regarding their motives in engaging in the dialogues, though practice showed the utility of these vehicles in managing problems in relations with the United States.

There were numerous less explicit objectives in the dialogues. According to U.S. participants in dialogues,<sup>2</sup> U.S. representatives tended to be the demanders, seeking to use the dialogues to solve problems perceived by the United States. The Chinese side was more inclined to use the channels to manage sensitive issues, without seeking the difficult decisions needed to solve the problems. The Americans also saw the channels as means to compel the often poorly coordinated Chinese international affairs apparatus to involve all relevant stake holders in the Chinese administration, thereby smoothing the way to effective implementation of agreements made during the dialogues. The dialogues also required effective coordination among American government representatives in dealing

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Yuan Peng, "Zhong-Mei guanxi xiang hechu qu?" (Where are Sino-U.S. relations headed?), *Waijiao pinglun* (Foreign Affairs Review) (Beijing) no. 2 (2010): 53-62; Shen Qiang, "Aobama zhengfu xin yazhou diyuan zhanlue pinggu" (How to assess the Obama Administration's new geo-strategy toward Asia), *Waijiao* (Foreign Affairs Journal) (Beijing), no. 98 (Winter): 28-47. For a recent assessment on how both sides view and have used dialogues, see Bonnie Glaser, "The Diplomatic Relationship: Substance and Process," in *Tangled Titans: The United States and China*, ed. David Shambaugh (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 151-80.

<sup>2</sup>Consultations during off-the-record meetings on December 15-16, 2011 at George Washington University with 25 American and Chinese specialists; all were experts on Sino-American dialogues and several of the Americans had participated in the dialogues.

with the issues addressed in the scope of specific dialogues with China. Meanwhile, American participants judged that both the Chinese and U.S. administrations saw dialogues as useful ways to identify senior officers on each side who had the authority and inclination to solve problems that continued to emerge in the ever broadening Sino-American relationship. These so-called “go-to” officials were sought out during crises or other stressful circumstances to help calm disputes and facilitate resolutions.

Other less explicit but broadly recognized motives of both sides in pursuing dialogues and exchanges had to do with building Sino-American interdependence in ways that would constrain one side from taking actions detrimental to the interests of the other. American specialists identified an enduring strategy involving dialogues and other exchanges used by the United States, its allies and associated states to build growing webs of relationships with rising China that would incline or compel the Chinese government to see its interests better served by cooperation rather than confrontation with them.<sup>3</sup> As noted above, Chinese elites and specialists were less forthright about their motives, but in practice China used dialogues and other behavior to build a range of interdependencies with the United States, especially economic interdependence, that served to constrain US leaders from taking actions strongly challenging or confronting Chinese interests.<sup>4</sup>

Also less explicitly recognized was the common tendency of both sides to favor generally secret dialogues as ways to deal with sensitive issues out of public view. This process limited the ability of forces in both societies that opposed Sino-U.S. collaboration and compromise on these subjects to muster support for their harder line or to otherwise complicate bilateral relations over the issue at hand. The responsible officials in these dialogues thus had more freedom of action to explore options for greater cooperation and compromise with one another, free from

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<sup>3</sup>James Shinn, ed., *Weaving the Net: Conditional Engagement with China* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1996).

<sup>4</sup>Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, 148-54.

constraints that would have prevailed in public discussions. The process of the various dialogues, even without meaningful progress, was also at times useful in fostering publicity that showed one side or the other taking action on issues of importance to their respective domestic constituencies, thereby assuaging at least temporarily the pressure of these constituencies for more confrontational approaches. Thus, for example, the process of dialogues on human rights and on trade issues was useful to U.S. administration officials seeking to assuage domestic U.S. pressure in the Congress, media and public opinion for tougher action toward China on these issues while avoiding legislation or other substantive steps that would jeopardize broader administration interests in sustaining constructive relations with China.<sup>5</sup>

In recent years, the scope of the many dozens of dialogues has broadened widely, involving most relevant senior official representatives in the two countries. The scope has grown in line with the rise of China and the importance of U.S.-China interchange on a host of wide-ranging global and regional as well as bilateral issues. In the decade after the Tiananmen crackdown, majorities in Congress registered opposition and wariness to engagement with China seen as beneficial to the Chinese administration. Over time, congressional opposition declined and Congress created a variety of formal exchanges enhancing dialogue and interchange with Chinese counterparts.

The notable exception in the pattern of growing Sino-American official dialogues has been in exchanges between the two militaries. The United States cut military exchanges with China after the Tiananmen crackdown. Senior-level official dialogue between the defense organizations of China and the United States was slowly restored in the following decade. The dialogue was significantly constrained under the leadership of U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld (2001-6) but was strongly encouraged under U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates (2006-11) and

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<sup>5</sup>Harding, *A Fragile Relationship*, 341-43; Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, 13, 74-81, 105; Tucker, *Strait Talk*, 28-152, 225.

Leon Panetta (2011-13) and enjoys the strong support of Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and his Chinese counterparts.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, China in recent years has used cuts in and suspension of military exchanges to register its opposition to U.S. decisions to provide arms to Taiwan.

The overall record of dialogues shows that they are important instruments in the policy “tool kit” of each side to deal with salient areas of common interests and disagreement that have broadened in scope as a result of China’s rising international importance and the increasing salience of an ever wider range of issues in U.S.-Chinese relations in the twenty-first century. Both sides view these policy instruments positively; they serve as shock absorbers in periods of difficulty, provide the basis for actual or potential channels of informal communication in times of crisis, and promote efforts to broaden common ground in U.S.-Chinese relations. The checkered record of military exchanges is among the array of evidence showing the reality that dialogues are subservient to the respective interests of the leaders on either side. Dialogues are instruments of improved relations but they do not compel improvement, which at bottom is decided by policy elites in Beijing and Washington. After forty years of efforts to normalize U.S.-China relations, those elites cooperate closely on a wide range of issues but also reflect wariness toward one another that underlines important diverging interests and differences dividing the two powers.

Specialists on both sides of the Pacific have had a tendency recently to stress the competitive aspects of Sino-American relations. 2012 saw a strong emphasis on mutual distrust and developments that year tested the durability of Sino-American engagement. As shown below, dialogues were among the means used by the two powers to manage the competition and pragmatically build ties amid sometimes adverse circumstances.

This article briefly reviews highlights of the role exchanges and dialogues have played in U.S.-China relations since President Nixon’s visit

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<sup>6</sup>“Hagel Congratulates New Chinese Defense Minister,” *American Forces Press Service*, April 3, 2013, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=119679>.

to China in 1972. Against that background, it examines the process and significance of recent dialogues. It forecasts the likely continued importance of the dialogues, as they help to build growing common ground and deal with an ever widening array of differences and issues prompted by China's rising international impact and the overall importance of Sino-American relations.

### **Past Experiences and Recent Practice**

President Nixon foreshadowed his opening to China in an article in *Foreign Affairs* prior to his election in 1968 that called for efforts to end China's isolation. As the secret efforts of the president and his national security adviser Henry Kissinger moved into higher gear, the president told the nation and the world in his foreign policy report of 1971 that developing a relationship with China was the challenge of the decade and that the United States was prepared to establish a dialogue with Beijing. Following the president's visit in February 1972, scholar Jean Garrison found that the administration argued that "candid exchanges with Chinese officials lessened the risks of miscalculation and misunderstanding and thereby strengthened prospects for long-term peace. . . . In order to improve bilateral relations, contact would be maintained through various channels, trade would be more open, and cultural and scientific exchanges would increase."<sup>7</sup>

The record shows that Nixon and Kissinger took on a large share of the responsibilities for dialogue of the senior leaders of the U.S. government in interchange with the Chinese government. They kept many of the sensitive exchanges out of public view. For example, their assurances to Chinese leaders about U.S. policy regarding Taiwan did not become known beyond a small circle of U.S. government officials until decades later. At the same time, the Nixon and Ford administration transferred intelligence

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<sup>7</sup>Garrison, *Making China Policy*, 30-31.

information, promoted other security, economic and cultural exchanges, and facilitated repeated visits to China by congressional leaders.<sup>8</sup>

The administration of President Jimmy Carter also adopted an approach of secret talks with Chinese leaders in reaching agreement on the normalization of U.S. diplomatic relations with China, announced in December 1978. It followed with a broad ranging and highly public effort to show progress in the relationship with efforts to engage different segments of the U.S. government involved with economic and security policy in particular to interact with Chinese counterparts. It also facilitated important delegations of congressional leaders visiting China to assess the implications of improved relations.<sup>9</sup>

After overcoming serious differences concerning U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and China's shift to a more even-handed public posture between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Ronald Reagan administration in the early 1980s, growing interchange between the two governments developed relatively smoothly through normal diplomatic and other channels and occasional high-level visits. This period lasted until the crisis caused by the Tiananmen crackdown. President George H. W. Bush sought to preserve key elements of constructive U.S. engagement with China despite majorities in Congress backed by media, elite and public opinion calling for more punitive U.S. measures. With the strong backing of Congress, U.S. government exchanges and interactions with Chinese counterparts were ended or curtailed. President Bush reverted to the secret channels of dialogue used by Nixon and Carter, sending his national security adviser on two secret missions to China in order to sustain dialogue with China's leaders.<sup>10</sup>

Bush seriously damaged his domestic credibility by resorting to high-level secret dialogue while publicly promising to avoid high-level official contacts with China after Tiananmen. Less controversial was the

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<sup>8</sup>Tucker, *Strait Talk*, 28-85; Mann, *About Face*, 65.

<sup>9</sup>Harding, *A Fragile Relationship*, 67-106.

<sup>10</sup>Lampton, *Same Bed, Different Dreams*, 21-30.



establishment of a formal dialogue with the Chinese administration on the subject of human rights. This kind of special dialogue established a pattern seen in the plethora of bilateral dialogues in U.S.-Chinese relations evident today.<sup>11</sup>

In endeavoring to break out of its isolation from developed countries after the Tiananmen crackdown, the Chinese administration was sometimes willing to establish special dialogues on human rights with Western-oriented countries, including the United States. In the private discussions, the two sides could lay out their competing perspectives and perhaps make some progress in narrowing differences. Under the circumstances, the salience of human rights issues as an obstacle to constructive relations was reduced and tensions over instances of controversial human rights behavior were more effectively managed. Without access to precise information on what issues were discussed and how the discussion developed, domestic constituencies favoring a harder line on human rights issues were unable to gain much traction in efforts to push for a tougher approach on human rights differences.<sup>12</sup>

Policy calculations in the United States and a number of other countries that had sanctioned China on account of the Tiananmen crackdown evolved to a point where policy and practice came to favor constructive albeit conditional engagement with the Chinese government through dialogues, exchanges, trade and other means. A Council on Foreign Relations compendium summarized views on such dialogues and interchange in China, the United States, and among China's neighbors in the Asia-Pacific region in the mid-1990s. It argued in favor of greater economic integration and security stabilization with rising China in so far as China abided by "ten principles" involving such issues as non-use of force, military moderation and respect for human rights. What the book's authors entitled "weaving the net of conditional engagement" involved a web of an array of exchanges and arrangements where dialogues and other such

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<sup>11</sup>Harding, *A Fragile Relationship*, 341-43.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

interchange would play their role in influencing Chinese behavior in constructive directions guided by the ten principles.<sup>13</sup>

The Bill Clinton administration in its second term came to emphasize the belief that closer engagement through various channels, dialogues and other interchange with China would hasten the forces of globalization and modernization seen moving China to change in directions more consistent with U.S.-backed norms. At the time, the Chinese and U.S. governments had shifted to a more positive posture to one another as they sought to build a cooperative strategic partnership.<sup>14</sup>

The George W. Bush administration initially was wary of a rising China. A clash between a Chinese jet fighter and a U.S. reconnaissance plane off China's coast on April 1, 2001 killed the Chinese pilot, and forced the damaged U.S. plane to make an emergency landing in China where the crew was detained for 11 days and the plane was held by China for months. The experience reinforced the resistance of the Bush administration's defense leadership to interact with China, even though the administration's broad strategic focus shifted dramatically away from a tough line to China as the United States moved to combat global terrorism following the terrorist attack on America in September 2001.<sup>15</sup>

By 2003, the Bush administration actively sought stability and cooperation in relations with China as the United States deepened military involvement in the Middle East following the attack on Iraq in 2003 and faced a major crisis caused by North Korea's public break with past non-proliferation agreements and active push to develop nuclear weapons. For its part, China was anxious to sustain a cooperative relationship with the United States and in the process build interdependencies that would constrain future U.S. pressure against China.<sup>16</sup>

Soon the two governments were working together closely and dealing with differences through a rapidly growing array of official dialogues

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<sup>13</sup>Shinn, *Weaving the Net*, 1-28.

<sup>14</sup>Lampton, *Same Bed, Different Dreams*, 46-61.

<sup>15</sup>Swaine, *America's Challenge*, 55.

<sup>16</sup>Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, 153,166.

and sub-dialogues. Beginning in 2005, a so-called “senior dialogue” involved meetings more frequent than once a year between the deputy secretary of state and China’s executive vice foreign minister. Sometimes lasting more than one day, the dialogues covered a broad range of international issues involving China and the United States and also reviewed the work of various sub-dialogues focused on specific world regions and other questions.<sup>17</sup>

Beginning in 2006, the U.S. and Chinese administrations employed a “U.S.-China Strategic Economic Dialogue” in order to deal with the wide array of often contentious economic issues between the two countries. According to the U.S. Department of Treasury, the “essential goal” of the dialogue was to “ensure that the benefits of the growing economic relationship with China are fairly shared by the citizens of both countries.” The Treasury statement appeared to reflect rising criticism on the part of the media, labor groups, Democratic Party politicians, and many in the U.S. Congress that U.S. economic relations with China essentially involved more cost and less benefit for the United States than for China.<sup>18</sup>

The dialogue was led by U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson and China’s Vice Premier Wu Yi (吳儀). U.S. Cabinet and Chinese State Council leaders involved included the heads of departments and ministries dealing with commerce, trade, finance, agriculture, health, environment, energy, and other senior administrators. The body’s broad ranging discussions complemented ongoing dialogues on more specific issues conducted by such groups as the Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade, the Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Treasury Department and the Chinese Ministry of Finance and Joint Commission on Science and Technology, bringing together senior U.S. and Chinese administrators in these areas.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>U.S. Department of State, “Conclusion of the Fourth U.S.-China Senior Dialogue,” Media Note, June 21, 2007.

<sup>18</sup>U.S. Department of Treasury, “Fact Sheet: Creation of the U.S.-China Strategic Economic Dialogue,” September 20, 2006.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

Bush administration officials and independent scholars saw great merit in what became a complicated matrix of over 60 dialogues between the U.S. and Chinese administrations. China scholar Thomas Christensen, who participated in many dialogues while serving for two years as deputy assistant secretary of state with responsibility for China, depicted the Bush administration's many dialogues with China as a major part of an effective administration strategy to elicit cooperation from China. He saw important progress in U.S.-China cooperation over North Korea's nuclear program, somewhat less but still significant progress on dealing with the genocide in Darfur, Sudan, and less progress in dealing with issues involving Burma and Iran. In economic issues, Christensen saw progress in the rise in U.S. exports to China. Christensen saw little progress in human rights and religious freedom issues, while China's lack of transparency in its military buildup was compounded by Beijing's suspension of military-to-military contacts on account of a U.S. sale of a large package of arms to Taiwan in 2008.<sup>20</sup>

Dennis Wilder, a veteran CIA China analyst and administrator, who served for many years as the senior staff member with responsibility for China on the George W. Bush National Security Council, also argued strongly in favor of the beneficial effects of the U.S. dialogues with China. He added to Christensen's list of accomplishments in noting that the Strategic Economic Dialogue saw China increase the value of its currency by 20 percent in two years, thereby offsetting building congressional pressure for punitive trade actions against China.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, U.S.-China relations specialist Jean Garrison judged on the basis of her research and a one-year fellowship working with the China desk at the Department of State that the various dialogues at the senior level had the added benefit of forcing the sometimes divided U.S. government bureaucracies to deal

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<sup>20</sup>Thomas J. Christensen, "Shaping the Choices of a Rising China," *Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (July 2009): 89-104.

<sup>21</sup>Dennis Wilder, "The U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue," *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, May 15, 2009, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2009/05/15-china-wilder>.

with China in a more uniform and coherent manner consistent with the positive direction favored by the president.<sup>22</sup> Her observation complements that of U.S. participants in the dialogues noted earlier who argued that the process had a beneficial effect in compelling the Chinese administration to involve relevant stakeholders in the often poorly integrated Chinese international affairs apparatus in order to insure effective implementation of agreements reached during the U.S.-Chinese dialogues.

### *Congressional Dialogues*

Concurrent with the rise of official dialogues linking the U.S. and Chinese administrations was a rise of official linkages between the U.S. Congress and its Chinese counterparts. As seen in Dennis Wilder's observation noted above that Congress's tougher line on trade issues might have led to a trade war had not the Strategic Economic Dialogue intervened and prompted Chinese currency changes, the U.S. Congress was usually depicted as more wary and negative than the U.S. administration regarding the implications of closer relations with China.

Congress broadly welcomed Nixon's breakthrough visit to China but registered through the Taiwan Relations Act and other means strong opposition to President Jimmy Carter's decision to break all ties with Taiwan and to push ahead strongly with engagement with China. Congress was the focal point of resistance to George H. W. Bush's secret dialogue and other efforts to sustain positive engagement with China when American opinion broadly favored a punitive approach. Many in Congress were disappointed with President Clinton's shift in 1994 from a policy explicitly linking the granting of U.S. most favored nation trade benefits to China to conditions that China improve its human rights practices in ways favored by the United States. Congress was almost uniform in pressing the President to take the controversial step of allowing Taiwan's president to visit the United States in 1995. Congress was the scene of a white hot

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<sup>22</sup>Jean A. Garrison, "Managing the U.S.-China Foreign Economic Dialogue," *Asia Policy*, no. 4 (July 2007): 165-85.

and often very partisan debate on China policy for the rest of Clinton's tenure. The debate focused on such issues as Chinese spying, influence peddling, human rights and economic practices, and the threat posed by Chinese military advances. In this context, legislation was passed that restricted U.S. defense exchanges with China that would facilitate Chinese military advances.<sup>23</sup>

Against this background, the exchanges that developed between Congress and Chinese counterparts in the recent decade appeared remarkable. Scholars have identified several reasons for the change. One involved pragmatic recognition that China's international importance, especially as a trade partner and place of ever growing investment by U.S. firms, meant that constructive U.S. interaction with China was important to protect and foster the interests of important congressional constituencies. A second had to do with the decline of partisanship over China policy as Republicans controlled the White House and the Congress, and did so with considerable vigor and party discipline.<sup>24</sup>

A third reason involved the impact of the terrorist attack on America in September 2001 and the following wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the overall war on terrorism. Preoccupied with these wide ranging endeavors of central importance to U.S. national security, Congress reverted to its traditional posture during such periods of national emergency and generally eschewed resistance and followed the lead of the president. The pattern of Congress asserting its rights in foreign affairs seen in the Taiwan Relations Act and other congressional practice since the end of the Vietnam War was no more. Congress saw its interests best served by going along with the directions favored by the president. The shift to congressional acquiescence reached a point where the results included the most serious challenges to congressional constitutional rights in many decades carried out by Bush administration leaders in dealing with issues of war powers, use of coercive interrogation widely seen as torture, detain-

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<sup>23</sup>Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, 79-81, 97-146.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 126-27.

ing suspects, and other sensitive issues. Congress did little in the face of these challenges.<sup>25</sup>

In short, an increasingly pragmatic, preoccupied and acquiescent Congress saw benefit in developing channels of interchange with China in parallel with the growth of official dialogues between the two administrations. Because of the diffused authority and weak institutional structure in the Congress and the fact that congressional initiatives toward China often depended on the initiative and interests of individual members, the various forms of exchange and dialogue changed over time. However, the overall increase in these constructive exchanges was clearly registered in the following ways.<sup>26</sup>

The U.S. House of Representatives Inter-Parliamentary Exchange was notably active under the leadership of Representative Donald Manzullo (R.-Illinois). Manzullo led congressional delegations to China in 2002, 2003 and 2005 for site visits and talks with Chinese officials. Chinese delegations of legislators and related officials also visited Washington, D.C. The Manzullo-led delegation to China in 2005 marked the seventh U.S.-China parliamentary dialogue which the U.S. and Chinese sides agreed had provided “the most efficient way to deepen mutual understanding.”

The U.S. Senate U.S.-China Inter-Parliamentary Exchange program was established in 2004 with the aim of exchanging views on salient issues in U.S.-China relations. Senate leaders Ted Stevens (R.-Alaska) and Daniel Inouye (D.-Hawaii) led delegations to China in 2004 and 2006, and hosted Chinese counterparts visiting Washington, D.C. During the 2006 visit, President Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) met with the Senate leaders and underlined that the exchanges between Chinese and U.S. legislative bodies “served as a vigorous driving force for bilateral relations.”

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<sup>25</sup>Gordon Silverstein, “The Law: Bush, Cheney, and the Separation of Powers: A Lasting Legal Legacy?” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (December 2009): 878-95.

<sup>26</sup>These examples are discussed in more detail in Bates Gill and Melissa Murphy, *Meeting the Challenges and Opportunities of China's Rise: Expanding and Improving Interaction between the American and Chinese Policy Communities*, CSIS Report (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2006), 9-11.

Following a visit to China in 2005, Representative Randy Forbes (R.-Virginia) worked with Representative Ike Skelton (D.-Missouri) to establish the Congressional China Caucus, which had a membership of 35 House members. Both Forbes and Skelton were leaders of the House Armed Services Committee and their interests seen during visits to China and interchange with Chinese counterparts focused on the strategic importance of China's rising influence in regional and world affairs as well as longstanding bilateral issues in U.S.-China relations.

Also in 2005, Representative Mark Kirk (R.-Illinois) and Representative Rick Larsen (D.-Washington) established the U.S.-China Congressional Working Group which had a membership of 30 House members. The Group followed an active agenda of seminars, trips to China and interchange with Chinese visitors that focused on discussion and understanding of China-related issues with the belief that "it is vital for Congress to increase its dialogue" with China.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Embassy sustained an active program of exchanges with congressional staff members. The efforts began slowly in the 1980s and gradually picked up speed. By the end of the Bush administration, the Embassy had partnered with Chinese institutes and American non-government organizations in arranging and paying for over 100 congressional staff delegations to visit China for consultations with relevant Chinese officials and experts and sight seeing.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Obama Administration: New Dialogue and Mixed Results**

Presidential candidate Barack Obama was unusual in recent U.S. presidential campaign politics in not making an issue of his predecessor's China policy. Like outgoing President Bush, the new president showed a course with China involving pursuing constructive contacts, preserving

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<sup>27</sup>Xiaoning Wu, "The Congressional Exchanges" (unpublished seminar paper, Georgetown University, May 2011), 4, 6.



and protecting American interests, and dealing effectively with challenges posed by rising Chinese influence and power.

A strong theme in President Obama's initial foreign policy was to seek the cooperation of other world powers, notably the world's second ranking and rapidly rising power, China, to deal with salient international concerns such as the global economic crisis and recession, climate change, nuclear weapons proliferation and terrorism. He and his team made strong efforts to build common ground with China on these and related issues. Heading the list of these efforts was the creation of a new overarching dialogue, the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED), begun in 2009. The new body replaced the Senior Dialogue and the Strategic Economic Dialogue of the George W. Bush administration. The S&ED met annually and had two dimensions, a "strategic track" which involved consultations led by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo (戴秉國), and an "economic track," led by Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and Chinese Vice Premier Wang Qishan (王岐山).

The outward manifestations of high-level U.S.-Chinese interchange seen notably in the three S&ED meetings and President Obama's 2009 visit to China and President Hu Jintao's 2011 visit to the United States were positive with various outcomes hailed by both sides. The announcement of the results of the "strategic track" of the 2010 S&ED meeting listed "26 specific outcomes" ranging along a wide array of economic, strategic and other bilateral, regional, and global issues.<sup>28</sup> The announcement of the "strategic track" of the 2011 S&ED meeting listed "48 specific outcomes, and that for the 2012 S&ED listed 50 outcomes."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>U.S. Department of State, "U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue 2010 Outcomes of the Strategic Track," Media Note, May 25, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2010/05/142180.htm>.

<sup>29</sup>U.S. Department of State, "U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue 2011 Outcomes of the Strategic Track," Media Note, May 10, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/05/162967.htm>; U.S. Department of State, "Joint Statement on the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue Outcomes of the Strategic Track," Media Note, May 3-4, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/05/189287.htm>.

Despite the positive announcements, however, the Obama administration came to see China's leaders offering limited cooperation. The Chinese leaders seemed focused much more on their own interests than the need for global responsibility urged by President Obama. Chinese officials for their part often suspected that added global responsibilities would hold back China's economic development and modernization. Furthermore, they criticized U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, President Obama's meeting with the Dalai Lama, U.S. military surveillance along China's periphery, and a variety of U.S. economic policies and practices.<sup>30</sup>

More worrisome, some Chinese actions and truculence directly challenged the policies and practices of the United States. Chinese government patrol boats confronted U.S. surveillance ships in the South China Sea. Chinese efforts to solidify relations with North Korea at a time of North Korean leadership succession, blatant North Korean nuclear proliferation and military attacks on South Korea seemed to destroy previous common ground between China and the United States and its South Korean ally on how to deal with the North Korean threats. China challenged U.S. and South Korean military exercises designed to deter further North Korean military aggression in the Yellow Sea. Chinese treatment of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and President Obama's meeting with the Dalai Lama was harsher than in the recent past. Chinese officials threatened to stop investing in U.S. government securities and to move away from using the U.S. dollar in international transactions. Furthermore, the Chinese government for a time reacted very harshly to U.S. government interventions urging collective efforts to manage tensions in the South China Sea and affirming that the U.S.-Japan alliance provides for American support for Japan over such disputed territories as islands in the East China Sea controlled by Japan but claimed by China.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Jeffrey A. Bader, *Obama and China's Rise: An Insider's Account of America's Asia Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2012); Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, 161-67.

<sup>31</sup>Bader, *Obama and China's Rise*, 69-82; Minxin Pei, "China's Bumpy Ride Ahead," *The Diplomat*, February 16, 2011, <http://thediplomat.com/whats-next-china/chinas-bumpy-ride-ahead/>; Robert Sutter, "Positive Equilibrium in U.S.-China Relations: Durable or Not?" *Maryland Series in Contemporary Asian Studies*, no. 4 (2010).

The Obama government reacted calmly and firmly to what Secretary of State Clinton called these “tests” or manifestations of new assertiveness by China. It gave no ground on any of the Chinese demands. It also found that prominent Chinese truculence with the United States and neighboring Asian countries over maritime, security and other issues seriously damaged China’s efforts to portray a benign image in Asia. Asian governments became more active in working more closely with the United States and in encouraging an active U.S. presence in the Asia-Pacific. Their interest in closer ties with the United States meshed well with the Obama government’s broad effort to “re-engage” with the countries of the Asia-Pacific, ranging from India to the Pacific Islands. The overall effect was a decline in China’s position in the Asia-Pacific and a rise in the position of the United States.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, the Obama government made clear to the Chinese government and the world that the United States was prepared to undertake military measures needed to deal with the buildup of Chinese forces targeting Americans and American interests in the Asia-Pacific. U.S. officials also helped to move China to curb North Korea’s repeated provocations by warning privately as well as publicly that the United States viewed North Korea’s nuclear weapons development as not just a regional issue and concern for global non-proliferation but a direct threat to the United States.<sup>33</sup>

The period leading up to the January 18-20, 2011, visit of President Hu Jintao to Washington saw actions from China designed to ease recent tensions and set a smoother course for U.S.-China relations. The harsh rhetoric criticizing U.S. policies and practices subsided; the Chinese put

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<sup>32</sup>Thomas J. Christensen, “The World Needs an Assertive China,” *International Herald Tribune*, February 21, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/21/opinion/21iht-edchristensen21.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/21/opinion/21iht-edchristensen21.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0); U.S. Department of State, “Interview with Greg Sheridan of the *Australian*,” November 8, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/11/150671.htm>.

<sup>33</sup>Elisabeth Bumiller, “U.S. Will Counter Chinese Arms Buildup,” *New York Times*, January 8, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/09/world/asia/09military.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/09/world/asia/09military.html?_r=0); David E. Sanger, “Superpower and Upstart: Sometimes It Ends Well,” *New York Times*, January 22, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/23/weekinreview/23sanger.html?pagewanted=all>.

aside their objections to high-level military exchanges and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates reestablished businesslike ties at the top levels of the Chinese military during a visit to Beijing in early January 2011; China used its influence to get North Korea to stop its provocations against South Korea and to seek negotiations over nuclear weapons issues; China avoided undercutting international sanctions to press Iran to give up its nuclear weapons program; China allowed the value of its currency to appreciate in recent months; and Chinese officials were more cooperative over climate change issues at an international meeting in Cancun than they were a year earlier.<sup>34</sup>

The successful U.S.-China summit in January 2011, the S&ED meeting in May 2011, and subsequent high level exchanges capped by Vice President Xi Jinping's (习近平) visit to the United States in February 2012 helped to sustain positive momentum in U.S.-China relations, even though the many differences between the two countries continued. President Obama made clear that he wanted to pursue closer engagement with China as part of his administration's overall re-engagement with the Asia-Pacific. His administration also made clear that it would not give in to Chinese assertiveness or pressure, and, if needed, it would respond to such Chinese actions with appropriate military, diplomatic or other means.<sup>35</sup>

## **2012: Testing U.S.-China Engagement and the Role of Dialogues**

2012 was a year of leadership transition in China and a presidential election in the United States. At the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress of China's Communist

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<sup>34</sup>Bader, *Obama and China's Rise*, 109-29; Sanger, "Superpower and Upstart"; "Beyond the Summit: Issues in U.S.-China Relations at, and after, Hu Jintao's State Visit to Washington," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, February 4, 2011, <http://www.fpri.org/research/asia/pubs/Obama-Hu.Summit2011.html>.

<sup>35</sup>Mark Landler and Martin Fackler, "U.S. Warning to China Sends Ripples to the Koreas," *New York Times*, January 20, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/21/world/asia/21diplo.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/21/world/asia/21diplo.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0); Bonnie Glaser, "US Pivot to Asia Leaves China off Balance," *Comparative Connections* 13, no. 3 (January 2012): 29-39; Matthew Pennington, "Xi Wraps up Highly Scripted Visit to US Capital," *Associated Press*, February 15, 2012.

Party during November, President Hu Jintao passed party and military leadership positions to Xi Jinping, who became President during the National People's Congress meeting in March 2013. President Barack Obama ended a long and acrimonious presidential campaign, defeating Republican nominee Mitt Romney. Meanwhile, North Korea's leadership succession following the death of Kim Jong Il in December 2011 and elections in such key regional governments as Taiwan, South Korea and Japan influenced circumstances along the rim of China—the main arena where China and the United States are encountering one another in increasingly competitive ways.

### **Growing Divergence and Competition**

Growing divergence and competition in Asia headed the list of issues in 2012 that challenged and tested the abilities of American and Chinese leaders to manage their differences, avoid confrontation and pursue positive engagement. Senior U.S. and Chinese leaders stayed in close contact with one another in an avowed effort to search for a “new type of great power relationship” which would avoid conflict and manage tensions as China's rising power and expanding interests rub against American interests, policies and practices. Nevertheless, competition for influence along China's rim and in the broader Asia-Pacific region exacerbated an obvious security dilemma in this sensitive region featuring China's rising power and America's reaction, shown notably in the two sides' respective military build-ups. These problems and Sino-American differences on a wide range of international issues and domestic pressures on both sides led to what leading specialists Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi characterized as pervasive and deeply rooted distrust between the two governments.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, *Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2012).

The Republican presidential primaries saw sharp and often hyperbolic attacks on Chinese economic and security policies. Governor Romney emerged from the pack as the party's nominee, supporting tough trade and security measures to protect U.S. interests against China. President Obama joined the fray with harsh rhetoric not seen in his presidential campaign in 2008. In the third presidential debate on October 22, 2012, veteran China specialist Donald Keyser noted that the president publicly referred to China for the first time as "an adversary" although the president added that it is a "potential partner in the international community if it follows the rules." Obama highlighted his administration's reengagement with countries in the Asia-Pacific region as a means to compete with China in security, economic and other terms.<sup>37</sup>

The Obama government's reengagement policy toward the Asia-Pacific indeed underlined a stronger American determination to compete more broadly for influence in the region. The security aspects of the so-called pivot to Asia involved U.S. redeployment of forces from the Middle East and other areas to the Asia-Pacific and the determination of the American leaders to sustain and advance U.S. security relations and power despite anticipated cuts in overall U.S. defense spending. Actual advances in U.S. force deployments remained modest although the scope, tempo and intensity of U.S. military interactions with the region continued to grow.<sup>38</sup>

American diplomatic activism in support of its interests was registered with an impressive advance in senior U.S. leaders headed by President Obama traveling to the region and participating actively in bilateral relations and existing and newly emerging regional groupings involving the United States. Regional problems impacting U.S. interests in regional

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<sup>37</sup>Don Keyser, "President Obama's Re-election: Outlook for U.S. China Relations in the Second Term," China Policy Institute, Nottingham University, November 7, 2012, <http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/chinapolicyinstitute/2012/11/07/present-obamas-re-election-outlook-for-u-s-china-relations-in-the-second-term/>.

<sup>38</sup>The material in this paragraph and the following three paragraphs are discussed in greater detail in Robert G. Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations: Perilous Past, Pragmatic Present*, 2nd edition (Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), chapter 7.

stability, freedom of navigation and relations with allies and partners saw the American leaders take an active role in discussing ways to manage and hopefully ease tensions over sensitive sovereignty and security concerns in disputed maritime territories along China's rim.

As President Obama indicated in his remarks in the October debate, the United States was also more active in competing in support of its economic interests as part of the reengagement with Asia. A highlight of U.S. interest has been the proposed Trans Pacific Partnership free trade agreement involving the United States and countries on both sides of the Pacific in an arrangement seen moving forward American interests in regional and international trade liberalization. The proposed agreement is viewed as competing with groupings favored by China that require less trade liberalization and that exclude the United States.

Chinese media and officials condemned the so-called China bashing seen in the American presidential and congressional election campaigns. The Chinese leaders remained firm in deflecting American pressure on the value of China's currency and broader trade practices and strongly rebuffed U.S. efforts to get China's cooperation in dealing with some sensitive international issues, notably the conflict in Syria. China repeatedly gave priority to sustaining ties with North Korea despite the latter's continued provocations such as long range ballistic missile tests in April and December 2012 and a nuclear weapons test in February 2013. They equivocated in the face of U.S. calls for greater pressure on Pyongyang.

Concurrent with the increased competition between the United States and China for influence in the Asia-Pacific, China resorted to extraordinary demonstrations of state power, short of direct use of military force, in response to perceived challenges by U.S. allies, the Philippines and Japan, regarding disputed territory in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. Chinese commentary accused the United States of fostering neighboring countries to be more assertive in challenging China's claims as part of alleged American efforts to contain China under the rubric of the Obama government's reengagement with the Asia-Pacific region. Top Chinese leaders countered American supported efforts for dealing with the disputed claims and also highlighted regional trade arrangements that

excluded the United States in order to undermine American-led efforts to advance U.S. interests through a trans-Pacific trade pact.

Against this backdrop, leading American China specialist David Shambaugh joined other commentators in concluding at the end of the year that the overall U.S.-China relationship has become “more strained, fraught and distrustful.” Intergovernmental meetings and dialogues meant to forge cooperation are becoming more pro-forma and increasingly acrimonious, he said; the two sides wrangle over trade and investment issues, technology espionage and cyber hacking, global governance challenges like climate change and Syria, nuclear challenges like Iran and North Korea, and their security postures and competition for influence in the Asia-Pacific.<sup>39</sup>

### **Cooperation and Moderation**

While the competitive aspects of the U.S.-China relationship grew in 2012 and challenged the utility of Sino-American dialogues and other forms of engagement, this article also pays due attention to the other side of the ledger in 2012. The latter showed Sino-American developments and circumstances arguing for continued pragmatism on both sides in seeking to manage escalating competition and other differences through dialogues and other means without major incident. The overall trend of resilient and positive U.S.-China engagement continued.

Among instruments serving to moderate the Sino-American frictions, the wide range of official Chinese-American official exchanges through an array of now over 70 bilateral dialogues continued and made significant progress in several areas. They also provided mechanisms for dealing with contentious issues and advancing common ground between the two countries. The on-again off-again pattern of exchanges between

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<sup>39</sup>David Shambaugh, “The Rocky Road Ahead in U.S.-China Relations,” *China-U.S. Focus*, October 23, 2012, <http://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/the-rocky-road-ahead-in-u-s-china-relations/>.



the military leaders of both countries—the weakest link in the array of dialogues between the two countries—was on-again with improved exchanges in 2012 and 2013.<sup>40</sup>

The so-called Taiwan issue—historically the leading cause of friction between the United States and China—has remained on a recent trajectory of easing tensions. The sharp turn by the Taiwan government from longstanding and often virulent competition to extensive engagement and cooperation with China came with the election of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) in 2008. The change was strongly welcomed by the Chinese and American governments. Taiwan's election in January 2012 and the victory of incumbent President Ma validated the moderate continued approach to cross-Strait relations, foreshadowing closer engagement along lines welcomed by both Beijing and Washington. A possible exception to U.S.-Chinese convergence over Taiwan is American arms sales sought by Taiwan, which are always a sensitive issue in China and in recent years have at times prompted stronger Chinese reactions than in the past.<sup>41</sup>

Despite pervasive Sino-U.S. distrust, there were also episodes over the past year demonstrating notable cooperation and seeming trust building between the two powers. Heading the list was the close and successful cooperation over highly sensitive issues involving sovereignty and strong national sentiment seen in the Sino-American handling of the case of Chen Guangcheng (陳光誠). The prominent Chinese civil rights activist in April 2012 escaped house arrest and fled from his home province to Beijing, where he eventually took refuge in the U.S. Embassy. After several days of talks between U.S. officials working with Chen on one side and Chinese officials on the other, a deal was reached to safeguard Chen and his family and to provide Chen with medical treatment. Chen

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<sup>40</sup>Daljit Singh, "US-China Dialogue Process: Prospects and Implications," *East Asia Forum*, November 2, 2012, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2012/11/02/us-china-dialogue-process-prospects-and-implications/>.

<sup>41</sup>Richard C. Bush, *Uncharted Strait: The Future of China-Taiwan Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 213-50.

subsequently changed his mind and sought to go to the United States with his family. He appealed for American support, notably in a highly publicized phone conversation directed to a U.S. congressional committee hearing. Intensive renewed U.S.-Chinese talks concurrent with the annual Security and Economic Dialogue between top American and Chinese department leaders then underway in Beijing resulted in a second deal where Chen and his family were allowed to leave for the United States on May 19. It is noteworthy that the key negotiators in this tortuous process were the leaders of a newly created and active Sino-American dialogue on Asia-Pacific matters, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Cui Tiankai (崔天凯) and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell. Cui's remarks at the end of this article testify to the utility of dialogues in U.S.-Chinese relations in the period ahead.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, the Obama government has endeavored since late 2012 to stress its interests in sustaining broader and deeper American engagement with the Asia-Pacific region on the one hand, while on the other hand playing down emphasis in the recent past on American security and military moves that add directly to the growing security dilemma with China. President Obama's trip to Southeast Asia and meetings with regional leaders at summits with Southeast Asian and Asia-Pacific leaders in November 2012 received extraordinary U.S. government publicity emphasizing sustained cooperation along a broad array of economic, diplomatic as well as security areas and soft pedaling competition with China. Meanwhile, competition with China was also played down by other U.S. leaders visiting Asia as the United States sought to calm tensions raised by the actions of China and other claimants to disputed islands along China's rim.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Bonnie Glaser, "US-China Relations: Xi Visit Steadies Ties; Dissident Creates Tension," *Comparative Connections* 14, no. 1 (May 2012): 29.

<sup>43</sup>See the speech by U.S. National Security Adviser Thomas Donilon and U.S. officials' media briefing on the president's November 2012 visit to Asia which were released on November 15, 2012 at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office>; Su Xiaohui, "Obama Will Be 'Smarter' in Rebalancing towards Asia and Engaging China," *China-US Focus*, November 8, 2012.

Finally, specialists on both the American and Chinese sides seemed to agree that effectively managing differences through a process of constructive engagement remains in the interests of both countries.<sup>44</sup> Thus, American specialists have noted that there are three general reasons for this judgment:

- Both administrations benefit from positive engagement in various areas. Such engagement supports their mutual interests in stability in the Asia-Pacific, a peaceful Korean peninsula, and a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan issue; the U.S. and Chinese leaders recognize the need to cooperate to foster global peace and prosperity, to advance world environmental conditions, and to deal with climate change and non-proliferation.
- Both administrations see that the two powers have become so interdependent that emphasizing the negatives in their relationship will not only hurt the other side but will also hurt them. Such interdependence is particularly strong in Sino-American economic relations.
- Both leaderships are preoccupied with a long list of urgent domestic and foreign priorities; in this situation, one of the last things they would seek is a serious confrontation in relations with one another.

Prominent Chinese specialists visiting Washington at the end of 2012 underscored the futility of conflict and the need for cooperation in a somewhat different way. They averred that the U.S.-China relationship has become increasingly important to both sides and that three “realities” compel the two governments to seek ways to manage their differences while trying to broaden common ground. Those realities are:

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<sup>44</sup>Consultations in Washington, D.C. involving three groups of visiting Chinese specialists, involving 12 Chinese specialists, and 30 American specialists assessing U.S.-China relations after the U.S. elections, November 8, 15 and 16, 2012.

- Each country is too big to be dominated by the other.
- Each country has too unique a political and social structure to allow for transformation by the other.
- Each country has become too interdependent with the other to allow conflicts to disrupt their relationship.

### **Outlook: Continued Pragmatism and Dialogue amid Competition**

The balance of competition and accommodation reviewed above argues for cautious optimism that pragmatic considerations will remain primary in both the re-elected administration of President Barack Obama and the incoming administration of President Xi Jinping. Both governments will be constrained from harsh actions toward one another by ever deepening interdependence; and the forecast for both involves a variety of high priority and difficult issues that will reinforce their respective interests in sustaining dialogues and avoiding serious problems with one another. Of course, the competitive aspects of the relations appear to be growing, making difficult forward movement in relations in positive directions.

American domestic politics promise to be an overall drag on progress in U.S.-China relations.<sup>45</sup> American public opinion and media coverage that tends to reflect public opinion show a majority of Americans disapprove of the Chinese government and its policies and practices. The majority is a slim one. There also seems to be a consensus among Americans that the U.S. government should eschew serious trouble with China.

U.S. congressional opinion also tends to be more negative toward China than overall public opinion. Nonetheless, many in Congress reflect the interests of business constituents who are investing in China or otherwise have an important stake in the burgeoning U.S.-China economic

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<sup>45</sup>Each of the domestic U.S. elements noted below are reviewed in Robert G. Sutter, "Domestic American Influences on U.S.-China Relations," in *Tangled Titans: The United States and China*, ed. David Shambaugh (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), 114-24.

relationship. In addition, many members of Congress have been active in several congressional working groups that regularly meet and hold dialogues with Chinese counterparts, often leading to more nuanced views of China on the part of congressional participants. Meanwhile, congressional attention on China issues has been secondary to more important domestic issues including U.S. budget issues, deficit reduction and tax policy, and more pressing international crises such as North Korea, Iran, Syria, and the broader Middle East. Congress in recent years has also demonstrated a strong tendency to defer to the president and not to assert its prerogatives on China or other foreign policy issues unless there is no serious danger for the United States and particularly for U.S. military service personnel and the president's policies seem to have failed.

Reflecting pragmatism amid continued wariness about China, President Obama upon reelection did not follow Governor Romney's injunction to label China as a currency manipulator. Rather Mr. Obama's treasury department followed past practice in its periodic reports on these matters with muted treatment of China. As noted above, President Obama's approach to China during his visit to Southeast Asia in November 2012 was more moderate and reserved in dealing with differences with China, while officials at all levels of his administration played down the sensitive security and competitive aspects of the President's reengagement policy.

By 2013 the deepening exchanges and array of dialogues between Chinese and U.S. officials appeared to enhance realistic and predictable relations that reduce the chances of confrontation not in the interest of either side. The scope of the dialogues involved the following:

- Twenty-four dialogues and sub-dialogues under the auspices of the U.S.-China Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade. They involved thirteen dialogues on trade issues; four on intellectual property rights issues; and seven on such salient sectors as agriculture, textiles and steel.
- Some of the above dialogues fed into the high-level U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue, which had twenty-five other

dialogues or sub-dialogues under its auspices. They involved seven dialogues dealing with energy and climate change issues, six dealing with such diplomatic issues as human rights, counter-terrorism, and broad security discussions; five dealing with various regions of the world; and seven dealing with other categories ranging from traditional Chinese medicine to export controls.

- There were also twelve other dialogues of various kinds dealing with such topics as corruption, people-to-people exchanges, and science and technology, besides four dialogues conducted by the U.S. and Chinese militaries.<sup>46</sup>

The continued U.S. commitment to close dialogue with China has been seen in the visit of incoming Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew to China in March 2013 and later visits to China by Secretary of State John Kerry and other cabinet secretaries. The Chinese commitment to continued dialogue seemed on display in these meetings with American officials.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, initial communication of new Chinese leaders with their American counterparts also showed strong commitment to dialogue and exchanges in managing the complicated relationship. Incoming State Councilor and former foreign minister Yang Jiechi (楊潔篪), a veteran of Sino-American dialogues over many years, advised Secretary of State John Kerry in early April 2013 that the two governments “should enhance dialogue and mutual trust” and “maintain high-level visits and contacts” as the two powers develop their relationship.<sup>48</sup>

Another veteran of dialogues with the United States, former vice foreign minister and incoming Chinese ambassador to the United States Cui Tiankai, seemed to take aim at those specialists and others in both the United States and China who recently have had a tendency to emphasize differences between the two countries and to view dialogues as of mar-

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<sup>46</sup>Glaser, “U.S.-China Diplomatic Interaction,” 175-76.

<sup>47</sup>Xu Song, “Li Keqiang Meets US President’s Special Representative and Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew,” *Xinhua*, March 20, 2013.

<sup>48</sup>Xinhua Agency, “Call for Stronger Sino-US Dialogue,” *China Daily*, April 5, 2013, 2.

ginal utility in managing tensions and improving relations.

According to official Chinese media, Cui said that he “does not agree with the so-called deficit of trust between China and the United States” and that in his experience “mutual trust is growing.” Against the background of his long, deep and sometimes intense personal experience in dialogues and related exchanges with U.S. counterparts, Cui said “We have worked together on so many issues, and on some of these issues we will certainly have different interests and have different policies . . . but still we have managed these issues quite well and the overall relationship is still developing.” Regarding mutual trust, he advised that “Maybe the level of confidence is not as high as we would like to see, but it is certainly growing.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

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