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U.S.-China Security Relations: Past, Present, and Future*

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Given the differing agendas of the United States and China, a meaningful strategic partnership is impossible under current circumstances. This should not, however, preclude a security relationship that aims at preventing the outbreak of hostilities. Future American administrations should avoid the assumptions, first, that engagement with China cannot be achieved without appeasement of China and, second, that anything short of engagement with China is isolation of China. Strategic rivals are not necessarily enemies. Apart from small extremist elements, there is no enthusiasm in either country for armed confrontation. China and the United States have an important stake in the continued prosperity of each other. Beijing will continue to test the limits of U.S. commitment to its allies and principles, anticipating that Washington's reactions will be restrained by America's belief that economic growth eventually solves all problems.

KEYWORDS: **"strategic partnership"; "U.S.-China security relations"; Asia-Pacific defense; cross-Strait relations; U.S. China policy**

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Background, 1949-69

The United States and China regarded each other with much hostility for the two decades following the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Under Mao Zedong, the PRC allied itself with the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, the United States became the mainstay of the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan, whose government was headed by Mao's archrival Chiang Kai-shek. After Mao brought China into the Korean War, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) personnel trained Chiang's troops to infiltrate the mainland.[1] American military planes flew reconnaissance missions along the China coast, sometimes resulting in their crews being captured and imprisoned.[2] An American Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) was stationed on Taiwan pursuant to the CIA's top secret judgment that "the security of Taiwan will continue to be hampered by the regime's economic difficulties, general inefficiency and corruption, and will require close U.S. control if U.S. military and economic aid is to be effective."[3] In 1954, the United States and the Republic of China signed a Mutual Defense Treaty whose major purpose was to protect Taiwan against invasion by the mainland. The United States prohibited any trade with the PRC, including nonmilitary goods or items with possible military applications. Washington also warned allies against exporting weapons or weapons-related technology to the mainland.

Although Beijing's relations with Moscow were to all external appearances solid for a time, underlying tensions had become noticeable by 1958. By the 1960s, accumulated grievances led to a sharp, very public, break between the two communist powers. The Soviet Union reneged on an earlier understanding that it would help China develop nuclear weapons,

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[1]For a fascinating account of these activities, see Frank Holober, *Raiders of the China Coast* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1999).

[2]For example, in mid-January 1953, two American planes were shot down over Nanaotao (Nanaodao), and another in Swatow (Shantou) during the following month. Captured U.S. pilots were sometimes paraded through the streets, to the derision of the local populace. See CIA Information Report, August 5, 1953.

[3]"Probable Developments in the World Situation Through Mid-1953," CIA Document EO-1993-005 18, original publication date: September 23, 1951.

and Soviet military and technical personnel left the PRC abruptly. This severely constrained the improvement of the combat capabilities of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). So as well did the ideological extremism of the Cultural Revolution, which formally began in 1966; the importance of weapons and training was ridiculed: all that was deemed to matter were politically orthodox attitudes. External analysts judged the PLA to be relatively weaker in the 1960s and 1970s than it had been in the 1950s.

The PLA's weakened abilities to confront external enemies had not gone unnoticed within the Chinese leadership, although most were hesitant to express these sentiments openly. Chinese leaders interpreted the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and subsequent enunciation of the "Brezhnev Doctrine"—that the Soviet Union had not only the right but the duty to defend socialism wherever it was threatened—as a warning that unless Mao returned to the Soviet camp, the Soviet Union would invade China.[4] After nearly a decade of hostility to both the capitalist world and most socialist countries, China's only reliable ally was tiny Albania. In any case, the only country strong enough to help the PRC against a Soviet attack was the United States.

The Emerging Strategic Relationship, 1970-79

The startling about-face necessary to reverse more than twenty years of hostility toward America must have aroused opposition even among the relatively small group of leaders who knew it was being contemplated. Defense Minister Lin Biao (林彪), who was also Mao Zedong's chosen heir, is believed to have been among those opposed. Many analysts believe that Lin's death, allegedly when the plane in which he was attempting to flee to the Soviet Union crashed, was likely the direct result of his opposing Mao on the rapprochement with Washington.

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[4]China argued that the Soviet Union was the one that had deviated from the path of true socialism, practicing "revisionism" and "deviationism." Moscow, by far the stronger of the two militarily, held just the opposite view and was particularly critical of the cult of Mao.

Internal bureaucratic opposition seems to have been a more difficult obstacle to establishing better relations with the United States than China's external commitments. The PRC's support for North Vietnam's military efforts to absorb South Vietnam turned into little more than lip service. Beijing did not cancel a scheduled high-level American visit to Beijing when, in the spring of 1972, reports surfaced that the United States had mined Hanoi harbor. In 1974, moreover, the PRC actually seized the disputed Paracel Islands from South Vietnam.[5] Hence, with relatively few public manifestations of domestic dissent, the Beijing leadership was able to effect a change of course that enabled China to establish a strategic relationship with the United States. From China's point of view, the major remaining issue that stood in the way of Sino-American strategic cooperation was U.S. support for Taiwan.

Within the United States, policymakers were concerned that an apparently sudden reversal of policy would have adverse repercussions both domestically and internationally. To ease the transition, they adopted an "artichoke policy"—i.e., peeling away the layers of hostility one by one—as opposed to the "one fell swoop" approach. The first layer involved the Nixon administration's announced removal of the requirement for comprehensive certificates of origin (CCOs), which attempted to keep mainland-made products out of the United States. In contrast to this very public signal with CCOs, the next layer was peeled away in secrecy. The U.S. Navy abruptly ended its patrols of the Taiwan Strait in November 1969. The latter decision was first conveyed to Pakistani leaders, who were asked to quietly inform the Chinese. However, the Pakistanis were instructed to describe the termination of the patrol simply as a goodwill gesture to remove an irritant. The move was not to be construed as a change in the U.S. commitment to Taiwan.[6]

PRC-U.S. negotiations at first took place through the long-established channel that existed between the embassies that each side main-

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[5]The islands were at the time occupied by South Vietnam, though quite obvious by 1974, when China seized them, was that Saigon was about to lose the battle with Hanoi for control of the country. As revealed in a White Paper published in 1979, the North Vietnamese leaders were furious at Beijing's action, but helpless to reverse the situation.

[6]Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979), 186-87.

tained in Warsaw. Later, U.S. National Security Adviser and later Secretary of State Henry Kissinger made use of each side's good relations with Pakistan to "disappear" from state visits there into Beijing. In the United States, a "safe house" was established so that high-ranking Chinese officials who were ostensibly visiting the United Nations could slip away for "private talks." Utmost internal secrecy also characterized negotiations on the American side, since the United States had a security relationship with the ROC which was supported by a majority of domestic public opinion. A continuing theme of the clandestine conversations between Kissinger and the Chinese negotiators was what to do about Taiwan in general and the security relationship in particular. Kissinger assured the mainland's representatives that after normalization, the problem would disappear since for a country to sell arms to part of another country would be "ridiculous." For the time being, however, since the conservative lobby in the U.S. Congress would be likely to sabotage any Washington-Beijing agreement, secrecy was imperative.[7]

Kissinger's memoirs neither detail the exceedingly frank discussions with the Chinese on the Soviet threat faced by both the United States and China, nor mention that, on both of his clandestine trips, he disclosed ultrasensitive American military intelligence to the mainland negotiators. Such revelations included communications intercepts and satellite photography on Soviet military forces and installations near the Sino-Soviet border. If the Chinese reciprocated with information of their own, there is no record thereof.[8] The implication of Kissinger's actions was that closer cooperation would be accompanied by more information sharing. He also wanted the PRC leadership to appreciate the expertise of American intelligence-gathering capabilities and to be convinced of the seriousness of Washington's *démarche* on strategic cooperation.

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[7]See William Burr, *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow* (New York: Norton, 1999), for a detailed account of these conversations; reference to the absurdity of selling arms to part of a country is on page 295.

[8]Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1985), 232-33. There is no indication of this in the more recently published *Kissinger Transcripts*. Garthoff was able to interview the aides who provided Henry Kissinger with the satellite photography and intercepts.

Difficulties postponed rather than actually overcome, President Richard Nixon and Mao Zedong met in February 1972 and signed the Shanghai Communiqué. In order to cushion the impact of the drastic reversal in attitudes between the two countries (presumably to their respective citizenries), Mao quietly advised Nixon that each side should continue to denounce each other a bit in public for a while. There were persistent rumors that the Chinese discussed possible arms purchases with U.S. officials. However, overtly at least, strategic cooperation between the two sides during Nixon's administration was limited to declarative statements that Washington was opposed to actions that either endangered the PRC's security or jeopardized Beijing's cooperation with America's policies in Asia. Despite the phraseology, Beijing's cooperation with Washington was more tacit than explicit.

As early as 1972, some Beijing leaders expressed, though not publicly, the desire to buy American arms. A RAND Corporation analyst was told by a Chinese general posted to the United Nations that Mao's "People's War" doctrine would be of little help in defending his country against Soviet attack. The general and at least some other military leaders believed that modernization with American weapons was important to the rebuilding of the badly deteriorated combat capabilities of the PLA.[9]

This expression of interest notwithstanding, the issue of arms sales was postponed until full normalization of diplomatic relations could be achieved. Failure to reach a mutually satisfactory resolution of the Taiwan issue made such normalization impossible during the Nixon and Ford administrations. One reason was the surrender of noncommunist South Vietnam to communist-led North Vietnamese forces. In fall 1975, Kissinger wrote to President Gerald Ford that the fall of the Saigon government had "created a context where any major change in our relationship with Taiwan which implied abandonment of yet another ally would be unacceptable" for foreign policy and domestic political reasons.[10]

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[9]James Mann, *About Face* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 58-59. The RAND analyst was Michael Pillsbury.

[10]Quoted in Burr, *The Kissinger Transcripts*, 372.

Ford's successor, Jimmy Carter, was not at first inclined to pursue a strategic relationship with the PRC against the Soviet Union. Carter hoped to transcend the Cold War mentality that had characterized previous administrations and establish a more trustful U.S.-Soviet relationship. This period of relative inaction ended in 1978, when Carter aides began to view Soviet activities worldwide with increasing concern. A policy reassessment resulted in a decision to move closer to the PRC based on three fundamental judgments:

* Friendship between the United States and the People's Republic of China is vital and beneficial to world peace
* A secure and strong China is in America's interest
* A peaceful, confident, and globally engaged United States is in China's interest

The *New York Times* article describing this shift named National Security Council staff member Michel Oksenberg and Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke as the chief proponents of the new policy.[11]

In May 1978, Carter's hawkish National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski visited Beijing to convey these sentiments as well as a concrete manifestation thereof: the United States had decided to "treat sympathetically" Beijing's desire to buy military equipment in Western Europe and purchase modern technology for Great Britain, Western Europe, and Japan. Although it would continue its own ban on military sales, the United States would not object to sales of defensive military equipment by its allies. China had in fact been holding discussions with a number of West European countries as well as the United States on such items as fighter planes and antitank weapons. Washington had already quietly begun to permit the sale of modern nonmilitary technology that had previously been prohibited for fear China would divert such imports to military use.[12]

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[11]Bernard Gwertzman, "U.S. Reported Acting to Strengthen Ties with Peking Regime," *New York Times*, June 26, 1978, 1, 7.

[12]Ibid., 7.

A week later, the Carter administration gave a still stronger signal on strategic cooperation, announcing that Washington had canceled a US$500 million dollar plan to sell fifty F-4 fighter-bombers to Taiwan. The ROC military had sought sixty such planes due to the imminent block-obsolescence of its F-5Es.[13] The process of normalization of U.S.-PRC relations accelerated; on December 15, 1978, the Carter administration announced the derecognition of Taipei as the government of China and the abrogation of the U.S.-ROC Mutual Defense Treaty. Formal Washington-Beijing diplomatic relations would commence as of the new year. Congressional anger at being excluded from the decision-making, as well as the Carter administration's failure to protect the interests of the ROC, resulted in the enactment of a new security commitment to Taiwan. This commitment, somewhat softer than that of the Mutual Defense Treaty, was embodied in the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) of April 1979.

Although Beijing protested—understandably, given Kissinger's words on the absurdity of one country selling weapons to part of another—the TRA did not, as some had feared, undo the normalization agreement or Chinese views on the desirability of strategic relations with the United States. The PRC leadership was still concerned with the Soviet threat. Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping, in a two-hour meeting with a high-level U.S. Congressional delegation headed by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Frank Church, urged Washington to sell arms to Beijing. According to Church, Deng expressed "dissatisfaction" with U.S. plans to maintain relations with Taiwan, but said that at the same time he was even more concerned about the international situation. He urged Washington to sell arms to the PRC and stressed the "new strategic importance of strengthening China so as to make the USSR act more prudently."[14]

Particularly after Soviet troops entered Afghanistan in late December 1979, the Carter administration would have been pleased to sell arms to the Chinese. Nonetheless, a welter of regulations had to be removed before

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[13](No author), "U.S., in Gesture to Peking, Drops Jet Sale to Taiwan," ibid., July 1, 1978, 2.

[14](No author), Agence France Presse (AFP), Paris, April 19, 1979, in United States Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), *Daily Report: People's Republic of China* [hereafter *FBIS-CHI*]-79-078 (April 20, 1979): B1.

sales could commence. This would have been cumbersome under any circumstances. In this case, however, Carter's relationship with Congress had never been good, and China's decision to invade Vietnam in February 1979 reinforced the views of those who had all along been skeptical about a security relationship with China. Despite these impediments, the Carter administration managed to take substantial first steps. In January 1980, just weeks after the incursion into Afghanistan, Carter announced the sale of nonlethal military equipment to China. As a consequence, the United States was able to offer the Chinese a ground receiving station for the Landsat photo reconnaissance system.

In March, the U.S. Commerce Department changed longstanding policy on weapons and weapons-related technology. Since the beginning of the Cold War, China had been in the most restricted "Y" category along with the Soviet Union. The PRC now moved into a less restricted "P" classification, of which China was the sole member. This classification change allowed U.S. firms to sell high technology to China at twice the rate of that sold to the Soviet Union and its client states, and to transfer to the PRC certain dual-use technology. In June, Geng Biao (耿飚), China's defense minister, visited Washington with a list of items his country was interested in acquiring. These included Hawk surface-to-air missiles. In September, moreover, a mission headed by then-Undersecretary of Defense William Perry visited China to see how the PLA might be strengthened.[15] Although significant ground had been broken, there was less actual weapons transfer than there were visits to try to reach a meeting of minds between the two sides.

Security Cooperation and Confrontation, 1980-89

Ironically, the period of closest U.S.-China security relations occurred under the administration of Ronald Reagan. Strongly conservative and an avowed friend of the Republic of China on Taiwan, Reagan was

[15]For an analysis of differing recollections of the Perry visit, see Mann, *About Face*, 110-13.

nonetheless more concerned with the danger from the Soviet Union, which he had publicly characterized as "the evil empire." Reagan's first secretary of state, Alexander Haig, was a firm believer in the philosophy that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend,"[16] and viewed the PRC as a valuable ally in the conflict with the Soviet Union. The deputy director of the CIA advanced a slightly different argument with the same conclusion: an alliance between the world's strongest military power, the United States, and the world's most populous power, the PRC, would be "unbeatable."[17]

Both officials—who were expressing widely accepted views rather than their own idiosyncratic opinions—seemed oblivious to the fact that the Chinese themselves had misgivings about such a relationship. Given their weak military and long border with the Soviet Union, the Chinese may have wondered if Washington wanted the PRC to deal with the Soviets while America's role was confined to supplying only aid and advice. A close Sino-American security relationship could tempt the Soviets into a preemptive strike. Beijing policymakers may even have suspected the staunchly anticommunist Reagan administration of a clever plot to incite the world's two largest socialist powers to fight (and fatally weaken) one another while making the world safe for American capitalist hegemony. Chinese publications sketched a different scenario that would better benefit the PRC: "the superpower and the later-coming superpower" (i.e., the United States and the Soviet Union) would destroy each other militarily while China would "sit on top of the mountain and watch the tiger fight" (隔山觀虎鬥 *geshan guan hudou*).

This did not sound like a promising strategic relationship in the making. To allow the airing of views on this topic, the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee held hearings in 1981 on whether to sell arms to the PRC. On hearing the author's argument that such sales might prove a slippery slope of no return given Beijing's disputes with many of its neighbors, a State Department official commented that in fact the problem was exactly the opposite: how to get the Chinese to take American arms. The slope was

[16]This sentiment was conveyed to the author by Haig aide Jim Roche in a February 1982 conversation.

[17]Author's conversation, June 1982.

all uphill, he declared, and the pushing was exhausting work.[18] The issue of America's continuing arms sales to Taiwan was also a sticking point. Haig's initial hope that Beijing would not raise undue objections to Washington's providing the ROC with military equipment if the PRC were also offered arms was not borne out. In June 1981, a high-ranking Chinese official declared that "we would rather receive no U.S. arms than accept continued U.S. interference in our internal affairs by selling arms to Taiwan."[19]

The PRC was mollified by the Reagan administration's denial of Taipei's request to buy the FX fighter plane and, in August 1982, Washington's signing of a communiqué pledging to gradually reduce the quantity and quality of arms sold to the ROC. The communiqué was highly controversial—among other factors, the document seemed to contradict the TRA—and its stipulations were frequently circumvented or finessed. Moreover, the internal bureaucratic battles that took place before the document—sometimes called "Shanghai II"—was signed were a precipitant of Haig's less-than-voluntary resignation as secretary of state. The signing of the communiqué, however, did allow U.S.-PRC security relations to proceed for the time being.

Agreement was reached on placing a state-of-the-art listening station in China's far northwest province of Xinjiang, whose proximity to the Soviet Union would facilitate communications monitoring. The information "yield" would be shared between Beijing and Washington. There were several further easings of restrictions on the sale of military and dual civilian-military goods. In May 1983, the U.S. Commerce Department announced that the PRC had been moved from category "P" to "V," a classification for "friendly states" for purposes of reviewing technology transfer licenses. In September, the Commerce Department announced a still more liberal set of regulation revisions via a system of "zones"—red, yellow, and green. The majority of the PRC's requests were treated as "green," meaning that approval was automatic. In 1984, China became eli-

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[18]The official was Roger Sullivan. In a previous position at the National Security Council during the Carter administration, Sullivan had visited the PRC to assess the needs of the PLA.

[19]Xinhua (Beijing), June 10, 1981, in *FBIS-CHI*-81-111 (June 10, 1981): B1.

gible for U.S. Foreign Military Sales (FMS) transfers.

In 1986, Liu Huaqing (劉華清), then commander of the Chinese navy, made a state visit to the United States, and the U.S. Chief of Naval Operations James Watkins made a return visit to the PRC. Faculty members of each country's National Defense University participated in exchange programs. U.S. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger visited China in 1983 and 1986. His earlier trip resulted in a military cooperation program whose major provisions included

* Improving the Chinese air force's F-8 high-altitude fighter-interceptor planes
* Allowing China to use U.S. technology to produce large-caliber artillery shells less expensively
* Making an upgraded Mark 46 torpedo available to the Chinese navy and improving its antisubmarine capability[20]

Other American assistance included Sikorsky helicopters, Raytheon 12 E 1167 sonar, and gas turbines for Chinese naval destroyers.

These programs were controversial within the United States, none more so than the agreement to upgrade the Chinese air force's F-8 fighter. Twenty years in the development stage, the plane had fallen far short of expectations; one prestigious defense review termed the F-8 "China's great leap sideways."[21] The American-assisted upgrade program, known as Peace Pearl, would provide US$550 million worth of electronics and radar systems and enable the Chinese air force to fly at night and in all weather for the first time. To those who expressed concern about whom the Chinese might choose to attack with the new plane, a Pentagon official replied curtly that "it's impossible to design a plane that can fly only north"[22] [i.e., to the Soviet Union].

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[20]James Gerstenzang, "China's Military Tries to March Out of the Dark Ages—With U.S. Help," *Los Angeles Times*, November 27, 1986, I-A, 3.

[21](No author), "China's Great Leap Sideways," *International Defense Review* (Geneva), December 1984, 1789. See also Kenneth Munson, "Fishbed, Finback, and the Chinese Future," *Jane's Defence Weekly* (London), December 21, 1985, 1389.

[22]From 1984 through 1988, the author served on the advisory panel to the U.S. Chief of Naval

There were problems from the Chinese side as well. Some Chinese argued that the PRC was able to produce its own equipment and felt strongly that China should indeed do so. Their reasons ranged from the patriotic to the pragmatic. On the latter end of the spectrum, the country's own design bureaus had vested interests to protect. Moreover, the PRC's experience with relying on Soviet help was a bitter memory which, critics pointed out, could easily recur with other foreign partners.

American planners were irked when China refused the particular model of a weapon that the United States offered to sell, but argued for a different one. Sometimes Pentagon officials were convinced that the PLA simply did not have the technological level to absorb the item. However, the Chinese suspected that Washington was trying to foist inferior or obsolescent equipment off on Beijing. Defense Department officials also had concerns about the PRC's motivation when the desired model had different capabilities. For example, the Mark 46 torpedo came in a variety of "mods": the United States had offered a model with deep-water capabilities that would have been useful against the Soviet Union. Beijing, however, wanted a model with shallow-water capabilities that would have its best application against countries such as Taiwan.

In addition, Beijing showed strong distaste for using the FMS purchase method advocated by the U.S. Defense Department since such a program gave Pentagon officials more control over the process. China preferred to acquire weapons through straight commercial channels. The PRC was annoyed as well at American insistence on selling complete weapons systems rather than transferring production technology and component parts. When U.S. officials tried to persuade economically prosperous Japan to bear more of the costs for its own and Asia-Pacific defense, Beijing complained loudly and frequently that the United States was encouraging the revival of Japanese militarism.

The United States had been naive to expect to be able to sell arms to both China and Taiwan without repercussions. However, the converse was

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Operations with special responsibility for Asia. Unless otherwise specified, references to this period represent conversations and materials made available to the author in this capacity.

not true: the Chinese do not appear to have been naive in believing that they could have better relations with the Soviet Union while simultaneously keeping the United States interested in a security relationship. The first signs of a tilt toward the Soviet Union became visible in late 1981; by 1982, the trend was unmistakable. At least one analyst believes that China saw a revitalized United States gaining strength vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, and no longer viewed Moscow with as much fear. Because the two superpowers were more evenly balanced, Beijing now had the opportunity to position China between them and play one off against the other.[23]

Although this development did not go unnoticed in the United States, policymakers tended to downgrade its significance. Supplying weapons to the Chinese would, they believed, make Beijing more likely to side with Washington on geostrategic and commercial issues. Training PLA officers in American military academies would give them a better understanding of our society's values as well as creating personal ties between individuals in the armed forces of both sides. Chinese students educated at American universities would likewise absorb liberal values. Upon their return to the PRC, the students would become opinion leaders within their communities and/or the country as a whole. Over time, their cumulative influence would help to mold a civil society. Increased trade between China and the United States was expected to deepen the relationships between the two countries. Additionally, more businesses would, American policymakers believed, create more prosperity. This in turn would facilitate the creation of a middle class, which would strive to create a sphere of decision-making distinct from that of party and government. In this view, the Soviet Union simply would not be able to compete with the force of positive example.

There were setbacks. Beginning in 1981, China emerged as one of the world's leading arms sellers and the leading supplier of low-cost arms to the Third World. It dispensed billions of dollars worth of military items to both sides in the Iran-Iraq war. This became particularly worrisome to the United States in 1987, when Iran purchased the PRC's HY-2 Silkworm

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[23]Harry Harding, *A Fragile Relationship: The United States and China Since 1972* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1992), 121.

missiles. The Silkworms carried 1,100 pounds of explosives—five times as large as those that Iran had previously used to attack ships in the Persian Gulf. Since the Reagan administration had permitted Kuwaiti oil tankers to fly the American flag as they passed through the narrow gateway to the Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, these ships came under the protection of the U.S. Navy.

Beijing responded to American expressions of concern by calling the reports "baseless" and "sheer fabrications."[24] When shown sequential satellite photographs of the missiles in China; the missiles being loaded onto ships; the missiles being off-loaded at Iran's major port, Bandar Abbas; and the missiles being set up in near the Strait of Hormuz, spokespersons continued the denial. The international arms market was complicated, they argued, and China had simply lost track of the missiles.

In October 1987, the Reagan administration announced a restriction on the export of high-tech products to the PRC in protest against the sale of Silkworms. A few months later, Beijing announced that China would institute stricter procedures to keep track of the missiles. However, in the same year, the PRC signed a contract to provide Syria with the 600-kilometer-range M-9 (DF-15) missile, and in March 1988 it was reported that China had transferred approximately thirty-six CSS-2 intermediate-range ballistic missiles to Saudi Arabia.[25] Other issues such as trade disputes and the treatment of dissidents caused friction as well.

American policymakers acknowledged these problems but tended to see them in the context of a situation that was improving overall: "two steps forward, one step backward." This optimistic attitude intensified as the Reagan administration transitioned into the Bush administration. President George Bush believed that his brief tenure as head of America's proto-embassy in Beijing prior to normalization had given him a deep under-

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[24]Michael Gordon, "Beijing Avoids Giving U.S. New Assurances on Missile Sales," *New York Times*, March 30, 1990, A8.

[25]For a helpful chronology of U.S. technology transfers to China, see Bates Gill, "U.S.-China Technology Transfer: Annotated Timeline 1980-January 1998," in *Rough Waters: Navigating the U.S.-China Security Agenda—A Handbook for Journalists*, ed. Robert Leavitt (New York: Center for War Peace, and the News Media, New York University, 1998), 23-33.

standing of Chinese society and personal ties to Deng Xiaoping and other leaders. In April 1989, PRC naval vessels made their first port call to the United States, in Honolulu, and in May, American naval vessels visited Shanghai.

The Impact of the Tiananmen Incident

The PLA's brutal suppression of unarmed demonstrators at Tiananmen Square and elsewhere in the PRC on the night of June 3-4, 1989 had a devastating effect on the perception of Deng Xiaoping's China. Much of the events were transmitted live to the horror of television viewers worldwide. The film footage belied the image of "cuddly communism" that Deng had cultivated. To many people, the events at Tiananmen seemed to reveal the implacably cruel face of communism and could not be rationalized with explanations of "two steps forward, one step backward."

President George Bush was not one of the people who interpreted the events of Tiananmen Square in this way. He felt that keeping good relations with the PRC leadership was important; indeed, he tried to contact Deng Xiaoping—who would not take his calls. A few days later Bush, clearly trying to achieve a response that would assuage outraged American public opinion while not unduly straining a Sino-American relationship that he regarded as crucial, announced certain sanctions. Since the PLA had carried out the suppression, it was the logical target of sanctions. High-ranking visits, including military visits, with the PRC were to be suspended. Military sales of all items controlled by the State Department and cited on the department's Munitions Control List were banned until Beijing improved its human rights record. The U.S. Congress introduced legislation suspending military sales, nuclear cooperation, and the export of American-made satellites for launching by Chinese rockets. The move also prohibited further liberalization of export controls for American products with potential military applications.

These sanctions were not as restrictive as they seemed. For one thing, the administration's order applied only to items contracted for under FMS. Since the PRC preferred to use commercial transactions rather than the

more cumbersome FMS process, a number of projects were excluded from the ban. Moreover, Bush had imposed the sanctions with great misgivings and tended to enforce them tepidly. There were also pressures on him from American business interests, who feared losing money and contracts to foreign suppliers whose governments had fewer scruples. Voices from the American military expressed dissatisfaction as well, arguing that there was more to be gained by talking with their Chinese counterparts than by ignoring them. By October 1989, the Chinese technicians working on Peace Pearl were back at their posts at Grumman headquarters in Long Island and at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. In December, the administration in essence rescinded two important post-Tiananmen sanctions by approving the export of three communications satellites to be launched into space by the Chinese, and by removing restrictions on Export-Import Bank financing to U.S. firms doing business with the PRC.[26]

It would be inaccurate to say that there were no consequences to the sanctions. When it became known that Robert Lagomarsino, a senior member of the House International Affairs Committee, had lobbied the State Department for an exemption to a company in his district, his constituents were outraged. Lagomarsino was subsequently defeated in the primaries by an opponent who made the congressman's lobbying efforts his major issue.[27] Additionally, in March 1990, Beijing formally canceled the Peace Pearl program, citing technical difficulties, cost overruns, and the possibility that—due to the sanctions—China might not receive the full benefits of the project.

The Disintegration of the Soviet Union

The collapse of the Soviet Union that began later in 1989 and was formalized in 1991 removed the original raison d'être of Sino-American

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[26]See June Teufel Dreyer, "U.S.-China Military Relations: Sanctions or Rapprochement," *In Depth*, Spring 1991, 8-24, for a more complete treatment of the sanctions and how they were implemented.

[27]Cited in Mann, *About Face*, 217.

relations. The Chinese had proved adept at triangular politics and did not relish being confronted by a single superpower. They had particular misgiving about the United States, since Washington took what was from the Chinese point of view an intrusive and sanctimonious attitude toward human rights issues that were purely domestic issues.[28]

American policymakers had made statements that they hoped for a gradual evolution of the Chinese system. While these were meant to sound soothing, they were in fact perceived as menacing: Chinese leaders interpreted the remarks as indicating that Washington intended to subvert both socialism and the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The Bush administration tried to assuage such sensitivities by in essence treating the PRC as a full partner in the "New World Order." George Bush personally called Deng, as well as several other world leaders, in order to enlist Beijing's support in a United Nations joint action against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. China was more important than many other players, partly because, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the PRC could veto the American initiative. Beijing seemed to have extracted maximum concessions—possibly Bush's promise to veto Congressional legislation that would remove the PRC's most-favored-nation (MFN) trading status—and in the end abstained on the motion.

Effects of the Gulf War

Just as the Tiananmen Incident was a turning point in American perceptions of China, the Gulf War proved an important watershed in PRC perceptions of the United States. In justifying the attack on Iraq by asserting a right to invade the sovereign territory of another state that had committed aggression, the United States was creating a precedent that had dangerous repercussions for Beijing's ability to take over Taiwan. The Chinese also saw America, now unconstrained by the moderating force of

[28]In fairness, it should be pointed out that Beijing has shown no hesitation to criticize the treatment of blacks and other minority groups in the United States.

the Soviet Union, taking on the role of international bully. The performance of American weaponry in the Gulf War came as an additional unpleasant shock, demonstrating that the United States was an exceedingly dangerous bully.

Bush then compounded his problems with China. Polls showed him losing his bid for reelection to Democratic rival Bill Clinton who had accused him of "coddling dictators from Beijing to Baghdad." Bush badly needed the electoral votes of two large states, Texas and California, both of which had important aerospace industries. These industries had been adversely affected by the drop in defense spending that had followed the demise of the Soviet Union. Campaigning for his continued political existence, Bush announced that he would sell F-16 fighter planes to Taiwan. This reopened the entire arms-to-Taiwan issue that had been relatively dormant since the signing of Shanghai II a decade before. The ploy also failed to get Bush reelected.

U.S.-China Security Relations in the Clinton Administration

President Bill Clinton's first year in office provided many challenges for the reestablishment of security relations. In May 1993, American intelligence agencies indicated that China was continuing to provide Pakistan with M-11 missile components despite having promised in November 1991 and February 1992 to adhere to the guidelines of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). In August, Clinton responded by banning U.S. companies for two years from dealing with ten Chinese aerospace companies. The companies were also forbidden to export items relating to rockets and satellites to China or Pakistan. In August as well, the Chinese accused the United States of harassing a ship, the *Yinhe*, that Washington claimed was carrying banned components for chemical weapons to Iran. After protracted negotiations, the two sides agreed that the contents of the ship would be examined in Saudi Arabia. The chemicals were not found. Some suspected faulty intelligence; others that the offending materials had been surreptitiously dumped into the sea. China denounced the incident as

further evidence of U.S. hegemonism.[29]

Foreign policy had never been regarded as Clinton's forte, and dealing with Beijing had thwarted much more experienced minds. An American cartoon summarized his situation aptly. In the first of two drawings, Clinton, in the pose of an animal trainer at a circus, holds a chair out to a large and slightly surprised panda, ordering it to sit. In the second, the panda, now angry, has sat down on both chair and Clinton. The chair is broken beyond repair, and Clinton's dazed face appears from underneath the panda's rump. His brief efforts to deal strongly with Beijing having failed, Clinton put aside his campaign rhetoric against coddling dictators and determined to carry on George Bush's policy of treating China as a partner in creating a new world order.

Within the United States, there continued to be considerable unhappiness with a number of issues concerning Chinese behavior, including the fact that Beijing was continuing to test atomic weapons.[30] However, quite a few American policymakers believed that—distasteful though the events of June 4, 1989 had been—now was the "time to put Tiananmen Square behind us" and move on. There were signs that progress was being made in security relations. In late September 1993, an administration official said that the United States had decided to "join the Chinese in a policy of engagement to address the problems we face together" and then-National Security Adviser Anthony Lake met Chinese Ambassador Li Daoyu (李道豫) for discussions on restoring military ties.[31] The following month, an assistant secretary of defense visited Beijing, thus ending the post-Tiananmen ban on high-level military exchanges. In November, the administration agreed to allow the sale of generators and other components for China's nuclear power plants and completed plans begun in the closing days of the Bush presidency to sell a Cray supercomputer to Beijing. A chorus of

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[29]See Nicholas Kristof, "China Says U.S. Harasses Ship Bound for the Mideast," *New York Times*, August 9, 1993, A4; Nayan Chanda, "Drifting Apart," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 26, 1993, 10-11.

[30]Patrick Tyler, "Chinese Test Atomic Bomb Underground: U.S. Urges Beijing to Join Moratorium," *New York Times*, October 8, 1994, A3.

[31]Susumu Awanohara, "Uniforms Unite: Washington Seeks Closer Military Ties with China," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 14, 1993, 13.

criticism protested that these moves would significantly enhance China's ability to develop nuclear weapons and missiles.

The pattern of halting progress continued in the following years. A Joint Commission on Defense Conversion was set up in 1994 for bilateral consultations on retooling Chinese and American arms industries to civilian purposes. However, this commission became enmeshed in a conflict of interest controversy when reports surfaced that an American member of the board had business dealings with the PLA. The commission was subsequently disbanded. And there were concerns about sizeable Chinese arms purchases from Russia, as well as annual increments of about 12 percent each year in the PLA's budget despite the absence of any real enemy and many worthy underfunded domestic projects such as education, health care, and environmental deterioration.

Military contacts were, however, firmly reestablished. The commander-in-chief of the U.S. Pacific Command visited China, and the deputy chief of China's general staff journeyed to Washington. He was the highest-ranking officer to visit since the Tiananmen Incident. The head of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency went to the PRC to discuss security and intelligence relations and tour military establishments. In March 1995, the USS *Bunker Hill* visited Qingdao (青島), representing the first such visit since May 1989 and the third warship port-call since 1949. More surprisingly, in late January 1996, as China was exhibiting extremely bellicose behavior toward Taiwan and certain members of the U.S. Congress were voicing harsh words against the PRC, the USS *Fort McHenry* paid an official visit to Shanghai.[32]

Visits are, of course, mainly symbolic and fall under the heading of confidence-building measures (CBMs).[33] Substantively, the distrust that inhibited security cooperation—as opposed to simply security relations—

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[32]Seth Faison, "American Warship Pays Shanghai a Call," *New York Times*, February 1, 1996, A4.

[33]For a fuller discussion of CBMs as they relate to Sino-American security relations, see Michael Krepon, ed., *Chinese Perspectives on Confidence-Building Measures* (Washington, D.C.: The Henry L. Stimson Center, May 1997) and Kenneth W. Allen, "Confidence-Building Measures and the People's Liberation Army" (Unpublished paper presented at conference on "The PRC's Reform: A Reappraisal After Twenty Years," National Chengchi University, Taipei, April 8, 1999).

continued. Disagreements over Taiwan that had existed before the beginning of discussions on normalization—the United States insisting that any solution be peaceful and China reserving the right to use force—constituted the major, but scarcely the only, sticking point.[34]

In February 1996, after the United States dispatched two aircraft carrier groups to an area near the Taiwan Strait to deter the possibility of a PRC invasion, security relations took an even further dip. Japan's alarm at the PRC's threatening behavior toward Taiwan led to the signing of a joint declaration with the United States on enhanced security cooperation in April 1996, including bilateral ties on dealing with "situations that may emerge in the areas surrounding Japan." A week later, a Sino-Russian summit was held that resulted in a declaration of strategic partnership between those two states. While Russian military might was a pale shadow of that of the Soviet Union and both parties declared that their new relationship was not directed against other nations,[35] the clear implication of the U.S.-Japan and Sino-Russian meetings was that U.S.-China security relations had taken a step backward.

Under these strained circumstances, the term "strategic partnership" came to be used to describe the relationship between Washington and Beijing. The initial suggestion for this partnership came from Beijing.[36] According to sources in the U.S. government, the concept was suggested to Warren Christopher, secretary of state in the first Clinton administration. He deflected the appeal. Madeleine Albright, secretary of state in the second Clinton administration, was more receptive. However, in the wake of closer U.S.-Japanese relations that Beijing clearly perceived as directed against China, the "partnership" could not have meant anything apart from rhetoric.

In any case, much as Kissinger and Mao's earlier strategic discussions had been, the Bill Clinton-Jiang Zemin strategic partnership was a case of

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[34]Professor Lin Wen-cheng of National Sun Yat-sen University, Republic of China, points out that the PRC uses the Taiwan issue as a bargaining point to extract other concessions from the United States.

[35]Matt Forney and Nayan Chanda, "Comrades in Arms: Russian Rapprochement Could Boost China's Clout," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 2, 1996, 17-18.

[36]I am indebted to Professor Lowell Dittmer for this information.

"same bed, different dreams" (同床異夢 *tongchuang yimeng*). Clinton, like Bush before him, seemed to conceptualize the new relationship as a condominium arrangement designed to ensure global security. The Beijing leadership was understandably suspicious of this view. While disclaiming any desire for "hegemony" and proclaiming the need for stability with numbing regularity, the PRC was anything but a status quo power. The PRC regularly claimed sovereignty over Taiwan; the Spratly Islands, ownership of which was contested by several other Asian states; and the Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands, which were held by Japan. Beijing had refused to foreswear the use of force as a means of solving the status of these areas. "Stability" to Washington implied adherence to the global and regional territorial status quo; this could not have been acceptable to Beijing. Moreover, the United States clearly expected China to play by American rules in terms of human rights, the treatment of minority groups, and many other issues including tariffs and intellectual property rights. If China was an anti-status quo power in the sense of adherence to territorial boundaries, the United States was anti-status quo in terms of these other issues. The Chinese leadership perceived Washington as being on a crusade to impose the U.S. value system on the PRC regardless of how inappropriate that system might be in the Chinese context. Hence, the strategic partnership was characterized by a sharp dissonance between language and reality from the very beginning.

In May 1996, two incidents surfaced that boded ill for the already scandal-ridden Clinton administration. First, the administration decided to accept Beijing's explanation that the proper Chinese authorities had been unaware of the sale to Pakistan of nuclear equipment used for the production of weapons-grade enriched uranium. No sanctions were imposed.[37] Second, a sixteen-month-long FBI sting operation against an arms company owned by the Chinese government believed to be smuggling weapons into the United States had to be aborted at the last minute. A leak from the administration was suspected.[38]

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[37]Steven Erlanger, "U.S. Won't Punish China over Sale of Nuclear Gear," *New York Times*, May 11, 1996, A1, A4.

[38]David Sanger, "China Arms Aides Are Sought by U.S. in Smuggling Plot," ibid., May 23,

These incidents were followed by charges that high-ranking Chinese officials, including the head of one of the companies targeted in the FBI sting operation, had made illegal campaign contributions to the Democratic Party's 1996 fund-raising drive. The company's head, as was later revealed, had been entertained at the White House. Evidence also surfaced that the administration "all but endorsed" a possible security breach involving divulgence of U.S. missile guidance secrets to China, and that the case "coincided with large donations to the Democratic Party from companies that benefited from deals with China."[39] Not everyone was convinced that there was complicity between the administration and the Chinese: some saw unfortunate coincidences where others perceived a plot.[40] Nonetheless, in March 1997, Agence France Presse reported that the administration was concerned that friendly gestures toward the PRC could be interpreted as a quid pro quo for Chinese campaign contributions, and that America's China policy was being "watered down" as a result. An ambitious plan to share technology on energy and the environment had, for example, been scaled back.[41]

Administration concerns notwithstanding, PRC President Jiang Zemin made a successful trip to the United States in fall 1997. In April 1998, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan (唐家璇) officially opened a hotline between their two capitals, a link that had been agreed upon during Jiang's visit. Dr. Albright's speech described the event as a manifestation of the closer Sino-American strategic partnership.[42] Negotiations also took place on an agreement that each side would cease to target nuclear missiles at each other.[43] Critics

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1996, A1, A8. The CBS television series "Sixty Minutes" later did a segment on the odd events surrounding the sting operation.

[39](Unsigned editorial), "The Sanctity of Missile Secrets," *New York Times*, March 15, 1998, A24.

[40]Joseph Kahn, "A Chinese Plot Is Easy to See—Maybe Too Easy," ibid., May 31, 1998, Sec. IV:5.

[41](No author), "U.S. 'Waters Down Policy' in Wake of Campaign Fund Row," *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), March 24, 1997, via Internet.

[42](No author), "Sino-U.S. Ties on an Upswing," *The Straits Times* (Singapore), April 4, 1998, via Internet.

[43]Steven Erlanger, "As Clinton Trip Near, U.S. Wants Out of China Missile Sights," *New York Times*, June 14, 1998, Sec. I:18.

charged that such agreements were unverifiable and, even if initially observed, could quickly be reversed.[44]

Despite the unfolding campaign contribution scandal and revelations that the White House had ignored CIA intelligence reports on security breaches involving the Chinese, Clinton cited the strength of the Sino-American partnership as justification to go ahead with a June 1998 visit to the PRC.[45] There he stated the "three no's"[46] toward Taiwan, thus reopening an already sore issue. The U.S. Congress reacted with anger, passing nearly unanimous resolutions supporting Taiwan and in turn angering Beijing.

Sino-American relations were further strained during the following year. The publication of the Cox report,[47] detailing China's theft of American weapons technology, sometimes with the aid of an administration that seemed oblivious to the consequences of its actions, prompted furious denials from Beijing. A Defense Department report, also released in early 1999,[48] described significant advances in the PLA's combat capabilities against Taiwan which would give the Chinese armed forces a clear military advantage in the next three to five years. Although containing no explicit policy recommendations, the report implied the United States would have to increase weapons sales to the ROC in order to meet the provisions of the Taiwan Relations Act on maintaining a balance of power in the Taiwan Strait. Talk of including Taiwan in the U.S. Theater Missile Defense (TMD) system further angered Beijing, as did the Congressional debate on a Taiwan Security Enhancement Act.

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[44]See, e.g., Peter Rodman, "Getting Serious about Security," ibid., July 2, 1997, A21.

[45]Steven Erlanger, "Citing Gains, Clinton Says He Will Make China Visit," ibid., May 27, 1998, A5.

[46]The "three no's" were no support for Taiwan's independence; no support for "two Chinas" or "one Taiwan, one China"; and no support for Taiwan's entry into international organizations for which statehood is a requirement.

[47]*Report of the Select Committee on U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People's Republic of China* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1999).

[48]"Report to Congress Pursuant to the FY 1999 Appropriations Bill" (February 26, 1999), available at <http://www/defenselink.mil/pubs/twstrait_02261999.html>.

Effect of NATO Actions Against Yugoslavia

In 1999, America led a NATO effort to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosovo that was being supported by the government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). This action was taken by Beijing leaders as reinforcing the precedent for the invasion of the sovereign territory of another country that had been set by the Gulf War. Unlike Kuwait, Kosovo was not an internationally recognized independent state, which made the precedent all the more ominous from the PRC's standpoint: Beijing had long suspected that Washington might try to dismember China by supporting separatist forces in such areas as Xinjiang and Tibet, in addition to Taiwan. The Chinese media heaped venom on American hegemonism. Military publications discussed how to defeat a technologically superior enemy through asymmetric or "acupuncture" (點穴 *dianxue*) warfare techniques.[49] Inserting computer viruses to interfere with the adversary's communications systems was a favorite theme. Terrorist tactics—the theory of "unlimited warfare"[50]—were also discussed, as were the allegedly successful techniques of "People's War" being practiced by the brave people of the former Yugoslavia against the U.S.-NATO aggressors.[51]

Hence the "strategic partnership" was already in tatters in all but name when, on May 7, 1999, an American plane bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. The PRC media did not broadcast President Clinton's

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[49]Barbara Opall-Rome, "PLA Pursues Acupuncture Warfare," *Defense News*, March 1, 1999, 4; An Weiping, "Developing Armaments by 'Leaps and Bounds'," *Jiefangjun bao* (Liberation Army Daily) (Beijing), April 6, 1999, 6, in *FBIS-CHI*, April 23, 1999, via Internet. The latter article emphasizes the need to develop "trump card weapons" (撒手鐧 *sashoujian*) selectively, since the PRC cannot afford to catch up with the unnamed enemy in all fields.

[50]Ma Ling, "Author Discusses 'Unrestricted War' Book," *Ta Kung Pao* (Hong Kong), September 19, 1999, B3, in *FBIS-CHI*, October 5, 1999, via Internet. A book with this title was published in February 1999 by two air force senior colonels. The major argument of this publication is that China cannot afford high-tech combat and can, therefore, only deal with "superpowers" by whatever other expedients present themselves, including computer hackers, urban guerrilla warfare, and terrorist activities such as those practiced by Osama Bin Laden. See also (no author), "New Book Published by PLA Literature and Art Publishing House Calls for Countering Military Power by Hook or by Crook," *Ming Pao* (Hong Kong), July 2, 1999, A13, in *FBIS-CHI*, July 8, 1999, via Internet.

[51]Qin Yonghua, "An Analysis of Operational Logistical Support on the Basis of a Review of the Kosovo War," *Jiefangjun bao*, August 17, 1999, 6, in *FBIS-CHI*, September 15, 1999, via Internet.

apology, and Beijing rejected administration explanations that the bombing had been accidental. Assaults on the U.S. embassy in Beijing and at American consulates elsewhere in China appeared to have government encouragement.

How, the Chinese media asked rhetorically, could one have a strategic partnership with a country that behaved in such a fashion? Clearly, the U.S. aim was to encircle and contain the PRC; the rift between socialist China and the United States would be hard to patch up.[52] American ships were forbidden to dock in Hong Kong, and obviously would not have been welcome at any other PRC port.

On the American side as well, there was a hardening of attitudes. Public opinion did not react well to seeing the U.S. embassy besieged. Books were published emphasizing both the Chinese threat to the United States[53] and the Clinton administration's complicity in allowing the threat to develop.[54] An influential Capitol Hill staff member argued, in his private capacity, for the reauthorization of the lapsed Export Administration Act to ensure that American technology would not be used to improve the military capabilities of the PLA.[55]

There were also signs of softening. In October 1999, Beijing gave permission for the USS *O'Brien* to visit Hong Kong, the first such permission granted to an American warship with attack capabilities since the bombing. However, at the same time, a navy P-3 *Orion* was denied entry. American officials described the *O'Brien* as a litmus test: having had ten previous applications for other ships denied, the officials hinted that another denial might result in the United States giving up on further military

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[52]Pan Rui, "Take a Further Look at the Dual Character of U.S. Policy Toward China," *Jiefang ribao* (Liberation Daily) (Shanghai), May 22, 1999, 7, in *FBIS-CHI*, June 29, 1999, via Internet.

[53]See, e.g., Richard Bernstein and Ross Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: Knopf, 1997); and Edward Timperlake and William C. Triplett II, *Red Dragon Rising: Communist China's Military Threat to America* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1999).

[54]See, e.g., Edward Timperlake and William C. Triplett II, *Year of the Rat: How Bill Clinton Compromised U.S. Security for Chinese Cash* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1998).

[55]Peter Brookes, "Facing an Assertive China, U.S. Must Adopt Firm, But Constructive, Stance," *Defense News*, November 1, 1999, 17.

contacts with the PRC.[56] While Washington appeared to be the supplicant in reestablishing military-to-military ties, there were also calls for caution from the U.S. side.[57]

The administration carefully stage-managed General Xiong Guang-kai's (熊光楷) January 2000 visit to Washington. Xiong's background was in intelligence, which was an especially sensitive issue in the U.S. Congress after the publication of the Cox Committee report on Chinese espionage. Xiong was also the person who had hinted four years earlier that Beijing would launch a nuclear attack on Los Angeles if the United States tried to intervene in order to prevent the PRC from taking over Taiwan. American newspaper reports stated that major changes were unlikely to occur in U.S.-China relations as a result of the trip, and also that Xiong had been warned that a continuation of the PRC arms buildup against the ROC would force Washington to sell more arms to Taiwan.[58] Xiong was able to meet with Secretary of Defense William Cohen, but his request to meet with National Security Adviser Samuel R. Berger was not approved.

The Clinton administration's efforts to avoid the appearance of a rapid improvement in security ties notwithstanding, by the end of February, the commander of the U.S. Seventh Fleet was declaring that "the United States is confident that its defense ties with China will soon be back on a friendly track, as Washington has never viewed Beijing as an adversary nor [*sic*] a threat."[59] And a high-level American delegation including Deputy Secre-

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[56]Glenn Schloss, "Beijing Allows U.S. Navy Warship to Visit SAR, Bars Patrol Plane," *South China Morning Post*, October 15, 1999, via Internet. The author does not find this U.S. threat very credible.

[57]A retired air force officer argued that, while discussions with the PLA should be encouraged, the United States should do so without helping the Chinese military to increase its warfighting capabilities. See Kenneth W. Allen, "U.S.-China Relations: Not a One-Way Street" (Stimson Center Report, December 10, 1999). A former army attaché to Beijing stated that "[The United States] should do nothing to improve the PLA's capability to wage war against Taiwan or U.S. friends and allies, its ability to project force, or its ability to repress the Chinese people." See Larry M. Wortzel, "Why Caution Is Needed in Military Contacts with China," *Heritage Foundation Backgrounder* (Washington, D.C.), no. 1340 (December 2, 1999): 5.

[58]Steven Lee Myers, "Chinese General's Visit Raises Only Limited Hopes," *New York Times*, January 26, 2000, A9; AFP, "Buildup Arouses Concern," *South China Morning Post*, January 29, 2000.

[59]Larry Teo, "U.S. Defense Ties with China 'Will Be Back on Track'," *The Straits Times*, February 18, 2000.

tary of State Strobe Talbott, the vice-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the deputy national security adviser was visiting Beijing. Hours after they left, Beijing issued an inflammatory 11,000-word White Paper on Taiwan.[60]

The release of the White Paper was construed as a direct rebuff of the Clinton administration's efforts to reconstruct a security relationship, and immediately revived calls in the U.S. Congress for an increased defense commitment to Taipei. One think-tank analysis opined that

> . . . the leadership in Beijing is aware of the Clinton administration's desperate need to salve the U.S.-Chinese relationship. And so the price keeps going up and up and up—from permanent normal trade relations to World Trade Organization membership to Taiwan. China can also manipulate American concerns, particularly about an alliance with Russia, to thin the relationship between Washington and Taipei—just enough to snuff out ambitions for independence. On this score, Beijing may be miscalculating. There could be a backlash in Washington.[61]

The backlash that did appear in Washington was mostly confined to Congress. In March, after ROC voters elected Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁)—the candidate Beijing had made clear it least wanted as president—the Clinton administration sent delegations to both sides of the Taiwan Strait, urging each to refrain from provocative actions. Washington also made clear, however, that efforts to sustain a strategic partnership with China continued. Less than two weeks later, a seemingly puzzled reporter for a major Hong Kong newspaper commented that "even though the United States says it may still be prepared to go to war to fend off any Taiwan invasion, it has invited Beijing to take part in a proposed East Asian security network aimed at defusing other tensions in the region."[62]

The Clinton administration continued to strongly advocate permanent normal trading relations (PNTR) with China and the PRC's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO). At the same time, however, the admin-

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[60]Xinhua, February 21, 2000.

[61](No author), "The Hidden Meaning of Beijing's White Paper," available through <stratfor.com>, February 28, 2000.

[62]Barry Porter, "Beijing Invited to Join Security Hub in East Asia," *South China Morning Post*, April 1, 2000.

istration backed a United Nations resolution condemning Beijing for human rights violations. Pursuing these apparently contradictory objectives simultaneously led to amused comments that Clinton had "one China, two policies," but it would be more accurate to say that Clinton was trying to please two different American constituencies simultaneously: big business, which stood to profit from PNTR and WTO membership for China, and human rights constituencies, which were outraged by Beijing's treatment of religious believers, ethnic minorities, and democracy advocates. The Clinton administration was aware that the UN resolution was doomed to failure, and that the United States could therefore overtly support the resolution with little fear of ultimate consequences. Obviously, this could not be publicly acknowledged, but the message was quite possibly quietly conveyed to Beijing.

Meanwhile, the Clinton administration suppressed the release of a Defense Department report which indicated that the military capabilities of the PLA had increased to the extent that Taiwan was unlikely to prevail against an attack by the mainland. News of the study, though not the study itself, was eventually leaked to Washington newspapers.[63] The purpose of suppressing the report seems to have been an assessment that the document's release would fuel calls for more arms sales to Taiwan, thereby inflaming relations with Beijing in a manner that would endanger the presumably higher purpose of regional stability. Administration spokespersons warned Americans against regarding China as an enemy,[64] although no one mentioned that Chinese publications regularly describe the United States as the PRC's enemy. For example, an analyst with Beijing's China Institute of Contemporary International Relations stated recently that "regional alliances can rival U.S. power and cut into its influence." He argued that China could cooperate with neighboring countries even though the PRC did not trust them, since, unlike the United States, these neighbors did

[63]Thomas Ricks, "Taiwan Seen as Vulnerable to Attack," *Washington Post*, March 31, 2000, A1; Bill Gertz and Rowan Scarborough, "Inside the Ring: Taiwan Report Held," *Washington Times*, March 31, 2000.

[64]Craig S. Smith, "Envoy Asks Moderation on Taiwan, Rejects Portraying Beijing as 'Enemy'," *New York Times*, April 10, 2000, A8, quoting U.S. Ambassador Joseph Prueher.

not threaten China's stability.[65] Chinese military publications, moreover, regularly demonize the United States.[66]

Not surprisingly, disagreements over relations with China would become an issue in the 2000 U.S. presidential campaign. Republican candidate George W. Bush described China as a competitor rather than a strategic partner, declaring that he would deal with China without ill will, but also without illusions. Bush advocated what he called a distinctly American internationalism that would establish closer relations with American allies in Europe and Asia but a more confrontational approach to Russia and China.[67] A RAND Corporation analyst followed with yet another conception: "congagement"—a hybrid of containment and engagement.[68] Implicit in the sloganizing was the feeling that recent administrations had been too accommodative to PRC interests.

Conclusions

As indicated by the brief overview of Sino-American security relations sketched above, the two sides are far apart on many issues and the level of trust between them is not great. Given the differences between the United States and China, the idea that a meaningful strategic partnership could be created was almost certainly unrealistic from the start. While some may argue that strong differences of opinion did not preclude the emergence of a rough approximation of a condominium—some might prefer the term "stable balance of terror"—with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, the current situation is quite different. Indeed, one may argue that the whole concept of security changed with the collapse of the Soviet

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[65]Yan Xuetong, quoted by AFP, "Analyst Advocates Regional Alliances," *Hong Kong Standard*, March 8, 2000.

[66]For a collection of these, see June Teufel Dreyer, "The PLA and Kosovo: A Strategy Debate," *Issues & Studies* 36, no. 1 (January/February 2000): 100-119.

[67]Ronald Brownstein, "Bush Outlines Objectives on Foreign Policy," *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1999.

[68]Zalmay Khalilbad, "Congage China" (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Paper IP-187, 1999).

Union.[69] The United States was willing to tacitly acquiesce to Soviet control of Eastern Europe, while the Soviet Union did the same with regard to Western Europe and, apart from occasional probes, Latin America. However, in the Cold War arrangement, unlike the current power alignment, both spheres of influence already existed: each side simply accepted a fait accompli by the other. Washington is not easily able to grant the same leeway to the PRC in Asia, since that would involve sacrificing important allies and interests. These would include, among others, both Taiwan and Japan: the former to PRC sovereignty and the latter to China's sphere of influence.

At the same time, apart from small extremist elements, there seems to be no enthusiasm for armed confrontation in either country. Economically, America and China have an important stake in the continued prosperity of the other. What is perceived as rational is not, however, always what is acted upon. The PRC will continue to test the limits of American commitment to its allies and principles, using America's belief that "economic growth eventually solves all problems" to restrain U.S. reaction.

Hence, while a worthy ideal, a genuine Sino-American strategic partnership is unworkable under current circumstances. The pronouncements of the December 1999 Yeltsin-Jiang summit underscore the difficulties in their declaration that the Chinese-Russian strategic partnership had been reinforced. Among other components of this harmony of ideas was Jiang's ringing endorsement of Russia's military campaign in Chechnya. The United States had been critical of Russia on the very same issue. Yeltsin and Jiang issued a joint declaration that they opposed "the use of pretexts such as human rights and humanitarian intervention to destroy the sovereignty of independent states" as well as "plans by some countries to build an anti-missile system in the Asia-Pacific region"—meaning American plans to introduce its TMD system into the area.[70] Yeltsin's successor, Vladimir Putin, and Jiang Zemin issued a joint declaration the following

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[69]I am indebted to Professor John Hsieh of the University of South Carolina for this observation.

[70]Xinhua, December 9, 1999, via Internet; Reuters, December 10, 1999, via Internet.

July in which the two sides declared their common opposition to U.S. plans on National Missile Defense (NMD); Putin also endorsed Beijing's definition of "one China" and declared that no outside force should be allowed to intervene in resolving the Taiwan issue.[71]

The unworkability of a Sino-American strategic partnership does not necessarily mean strong security antagonism or the absence of any security relationship at all. In essence, American policy has attempted to simultaneously reassure China and deter China. Since China will almost surely not agree to desist from aggression to assert control over territories Beijing has staked claims to, U.S. policy is unlikely to succeed. Rather than try to create what at least at present seems impossible, the two sides should concentrate on minimizing problems in such areas where cooperation is possible and, as a Mao-era negotiating phrase articulated, "reserve their differences." An analyst with a Beijing think-tank has also suggested that this would be feasible. Predicting a deepening of structural strategic contradictions between China and the United States, he opines that passive security cooperation, defined as measures to prevent the outbreak of war between the two sides, may nonetheless be possible.[72]

U.S. administrations should understand, as Chinese leaders apparently always have, that differences of opinion may not be resolvable. Engagement does not mean appeasement. Nor, contrary to the implications of recent administration statements, does the term mean that anything short of engagement/appeasement is isolation.

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[71]Xinhua, July 18, 2000, via Internet.

[72]Yan Xuetong, "Trend of Changes in China's Security Environment for the New Century," *Zhongguo pinglunchi* (Hong Kong), May 5, 2000, 35-39, in *FBIS-CHI*, May 5, 2000, via Internet.