

US-China Relations under Bush and Obama: Fill in the Blanks or It's the Structure, Stupid?*

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There are numerous studies of Sino-American relations during George W. Bush's tenure in office, but not many investigating it over the course of Barack Obama's stint in the White House. While there are quite a few comparisons of Bush Jr. and Obama's personalities, policies, and accomplishments, there are no systematic comparisons of their China policies. This article aims to rectify these deficiencies by providing detailed information about Obama's policies towards China and a comparison of the two presidents' China policies. It undertakes this comparison across five political, economic, and social issue areas. The first is Bush Jr. and Obama's respective stances towards the Taiwan issue. The second is their dealings with China in regard to security problems. The third is the policies of the two US presidents with respect to economic issues. The fourth is their human rights policies. The fifth is their China doctrines. This study concludes there is little to set apart the China policies of Bush Jr. and Obama despite these individual's many other differences. There

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are periods such as the two presidents' first years in office where China policy differences were stark, but on the whole the similarities between their policies are greater than the differences.

KEYWORDS: Bush; Obama; China; neoclassical realism; United States.

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The beginning of United States President Barack Obama's second term in office provides a fruitful opportunity to compare his policy towards the People's Republic of China (PRC) against that of his predecessor George W. Bush. The first year of Obama's presidency appeared to herald a dramatic change in the US-PRC relationship, particularly given that bilateral relations during G.W. Bush's first year in office were quite tense.¹ Nevertheless, by the end of Obama's second year in office, the tenor and content of Sino-US relations felt comparable to G.W. Bush's final year in office with Obama's newfound talk of a (re) pivot or (re) balance to Asia. International and domestic realities bounded what the two presidents could do. Indeed, there are quite a few similarities between G.W. Bush's and Obama's China policies as well as those of their predecessors Presidents George H. W. Bush and William J. Clinton.

There are a number of works covering Washington's stance towards Beijing during the G.W. Bush interregnum. Some of this literature is quite wide ranging.² Other streams focus on specific issues in the bilateral relationship such as the G.W. Bush administration's Global War on Terror (GWOT).³ Not surprisingly, given that Obama has been in office

¹On Bush's stance towards China during his first year in office, see Jia Qingguo, "Learning to Live with the Hegemon: Evolution of China's Policy towards the US since the End of the Cold War," *Journal of Contemporary China* 14, no. 44 (August 2005): 395-407.

²See, e.g., Jean A. Garrison, *Making China Policy: From Nixon to G.W. Bush* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2005); Chi Wang, *George W. Bush and China: Policies, Problems, and Partnership* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2008); and Robert Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations: Perilous Past, Pragmatic Present* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010).

³See, e.g., Brendan Taylor, "US-China Relations after 11 September: A Long Engagement or Marriage of Convenience," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 59, no. 2 (June 2005): 179-99. Herein, the GWOT is defined not only as the fight against global terrorism, but also includes the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

less than five years, there are far fewer scholarly treatments of his China policy.⁴ Another lacuna is that, even though there are comparisons of the policies, personalities, and accomplishments of G.W. Bush and Obama, there are no systematic comparisons of the two president's China policies. This article seeks to rectify these deficiencies by providing detailed information about Obama's policies towards China and a comparison of the two presidents' China policies, which is the main emphasis of this article. It does so by exploiting more than six dozen primary and secondary sources, particularly *Comparative Connections*, a widely distributed and respected quarterly news summary of developments in various Asia-Pacific Region (APR) bilateral relationships that is prepared under the auspices of the Pacific Forum CSIS, a nonprofit, private, foreign policy research institute that operates as the Asia-Pacific arm of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.⁵

The policy relevance of understanding US China policy under G.W. Bush and Obama is quite evident given the two countries' importance. While not the central focus of this piece, US China policy is theoretically interesting, too. When there are similarities in China policy despite different parties controlling the White House, different presidential personalities, and so on, this raises important questions concerning the impact of "structure"—understood herein as a dynamic mix of the balance of capabilities (political, military, and economic), the balance of needs (the relative need of one party for another to achieve its foreign policy and domestic objectives), international institutions (international laws, organizations, and norms), interdependencies (political, military, economic, social, and otherwise)—and domestic institutions (constitutions, laws/regulations, norms, balance

⁴Robert Sutter, "The Obama Administration and China: Positive but Fragile Equilibrium," *Asian Perspective* 33, no. 3 (2009): 81-106.

⁵Current and previous issues as well as a description of *Comparative Connections* can be found at <http://csis.org/program/comparative-connections>. Although one or two authors often prepare individual chapters, individual chapters actually represent a chronology distilled from dozens or more sources such as American, Chinese, Japan, Korean, and other mass media, government reports, and scholarly publications.

of political forces)—on bilateral relations.⁶ Conversely, when there are differences in policies despite a similar mix of structural factors, this suggests a need to go beyond explanations that emphasize such variables.

It needs to be recognized that the components of structure can push a country's foreign policy in the same as well as in contradictory directions. With respect to the former, if a country has an unfavorable balance of capabilities vis-à-vis another country (i.e., is politically, economically, and/or military weaker), has a strong need for that country, and is constrained from confronting that country due to a global treaty (i.e., an international institution), then it is likely it will adopt a cooperative or deferential stance towards that country. In regard to the latter, a militarily stronger country that is going through an economically difficult time has the ability to be more assertive because of the balance of capabilities while also facing concurrent pressures to be cooperative because of the balance of needs. Of further note, individual components of structure can push a country's foreign policy in different ways. To illustrate, a shifting balance of capabilities can push one country to become more assertive towards another country because the latter constitutes a growing challenge to the existing order while at the same time restraining the former country from becoming overly assertive towards the latter. The complex ways in which structure dynamically operates means that analysts must pay special attention to the context in order to accurately assess how structure shapes a given country's foreign policy towards another at any given point in time.

One intriguing empirical finding of this comparative study is that there is little to set apart the China policies of G.W. Bush and Obama, the former whom many might characterize as one of the most conservative, militaristic, and unilateralist presidents to occupy the White House in recent decades and the latter whom many have labeled an archetypical liberal idealist. In fact, an examination of the Taiwan policies of the two

⁶Examples of structural approaches to US-China relations include Harvey W. Nelson, *Power and Insecurity: Beijing, Moscow, and Washington* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1989); and Banning Garrett, "US-China Relations in the Era of Globalization and Terror: A Framework for Analysis," *Journal of Contemporary China* 15, no. 48 (August 2006): 389-415.

presidents, their stances on security issues like North Korea, their interactions with China in the realm of economics, their China policies as far as human rights are concerned, and their China doctrines exhibit a high degree of similarity. Certainly, there are periods such as the two presidents' first years in office where China policy differences were stark, but on the whole the similarities between the two administrations' China policies are greater than the differences.

The plan of this article is as follows. The next section examines the stances that G.W. Bush and Obama took towards the Taiwan issue on matters such as arms sales. The third part considers their dealings with China in regard to security problems like North Korea. The next part reflects on the policies of the two US presidents with respect to economic issues like China's currency policy and compliance with its World Trade Organization (WTO) obligations. The fifth section compares their China-specific human rights policies. The sixth section assesses G.W. Bush's and Obama's China doctrines. The seventh section makes some theoretical and policy observations. The last section provides a summary, discusses some future research avenues, and offers a few concluding remarks.

Taiwan

Since the 1950s, the Taiwan problem has been one of the most divisive issues in Sino-American relations. In the mid-1990s, it not only fueled significant political frictions between Beijing and Washington, but also seemed to have the potential to spark a major military US-PRC confrontation. Taiwan's moves towards greater *de facto* and even *de jure* independence from the mainland in the second half of the 1990s and most of the first decade of the twenty-first century have presented new challenges and risks for US China policies.⁷ In terms of Taiwan policy, US presidents

⁷A useful primer on the Taiwan issue is Jean-Marc F. Blanchard and Dennis V. Hickey, eds., *New Thinking about The Taiwan Issue: Theoretical Insights into Its Origins, Dynamics, and Prospects* (London: Routledge, 2012).

have had to determine whether or not to continue American arms sales to Taiwan as well as what and how much to sell. They also have had to manage the fallout from Beijing's varying, but always disapproving reactions to these sales. They have further had to decide how to respond to Taiwan's moves towards independence and how much to support Taiwan's quest for international space. Finally, they have had to make choices about the closeness of US ties with the island.

Arms sales: G.W. Bush made clear from the beginning that he would make significant arms sales to Taiwan. Several months after taking office, his administration approved a \$5 billion arms sales package involving submarines and Kidd-class destroyers. Three years later, the US announced it would sell advanced long-range radar systems to Taiwan. In September 2007, despite intense Chinese lobbying, the administration followed through with the sale of hundreds of air-to-air and air-to-ground missiles to Taiwan that it had announced seven months earlier, supplemented by a dozen P-3C Orion aircraft. In November, it detailed plans to upgrade Taiwan's anti-missile systems.⁸ Despite repeated protestations by China, October 2008 found the White House notifying Congress of a \$6.5 billion arms sales package to Taiwan largely consisting of arms already included in the 2001 US-Taiwan deal.⁹

Obama sought to put his administration's relationship with China on a good footing from the get-go by taking a cautious position on arms sales. Over time, however, he proved more willing to sell arms. For example, at the start of 2010, the US awarded contracts for Patriot 3 missiles and sold Taiwan approximately \$6.5 billion in equipment including Black Hawk helicopters, anti-ship missiles, and F-16 A/B fighter upgrades. Even so,

⁸For discussions of these arms sales, see Dennis V. Hickey, "Continuity and Change: The Administration of George W. Bush and US Policy toward Taiwan," *Journal of Contemporary China* 13, no. 40 (August 2004): 461-78; Bonnie S. Glaser, "Old and New Challenges: ASAT Test, Taiwan, and Trade," *Comparative Connections* 9, no. 1 (April 2007): 31; Bonnie S. Glaser, "China Signals Irritation with U.S. Policy," *Comparative Connections* 9, no. 4 (January 2008): 3; and various chapters in Blanchard and Hickey, eds., *New Thinking about the Taiwan Issue*.

⁹Bonnie S. Glaser, "Ties Solid for Transition, but Challenges Lurk," *Comparative Connections*, 10, no. 4 (January 2009): 3.

this deal “was limited to items pending from” his predecessor’s April 2001 deal and did not satisfy Taiwan’s request for advanced F-16 C/D fighters or a “submarine feasibility study.”¹⁰ Still, in late August 2010, the US stated it would provide services, technical data, and articles for Taiwan’s air defenses and radar equipment for Taiwan’s indigenous fighter jet program. Moreover, the administration announced, in September 2011, a nearly \$6 billion deal involving upgrades to Taiwan’s F-16 A/B fighters, plane parts, and training. Beyond this, while the US did not approve a sale of F-16 C/D fighters, neither would it reject one in the future.¹¹

The US and the Taiwan independence movement: Beginning in 2003, the Taiwan independence movement started to become a source of cooperation between Washington and Beijing. This is because the US, reacting to strong PRC warnings and its need to concentrate on problems such as the GWOT, moved to curb Taiwanese independence forces. The US was not enthusiastic about reining in President Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), as shown by its support for Taiwan’s observer status in the World Health Assembly. Still, it repeatedly opposed independence, panned Chen’s unilateral moves to change the status quo, and assured Beijing its policy had not changed. In fall 2004, it became more forceful with top US policy-makers such as Secretary of State Colin Powell and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage proclaiming Taiwan did not have a blank check and lacked sovereignty, and that the US was not required to defend Taiwan.¹²

¹⁰Bonnie S. Glaser, “The Honeymoon Ends,” *Comparative Connections* 12, no. 1 (March 2010): 2-3.

¹¹Glaser, “The Honeymoon Ends,” 2-3; Bonnie S. Glaser and Brittany Billingsley, “Pomp and Substance: Hu’s State Visit to the US,” *Comparative Connections* 13, no. 1 (April 2011): 9; Bonnie S. Glaser and Brittany Billingsley, “Tensions Rise and Fall, Once Again” *Comparative Connections* 12, no. 3 (October 2010): 9, 15; and Wu Jiao, Cui Haipei, and Zhao Shengnan, “US Arms Sales to Taiwan ‘Will Spark Retaliation’,” *China Daily*, September 23, 2011, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/us/2011-09/23/content_13776034.htm (accessed September 23, 2011).

¹²Bonnie S. Glaser, “A Familiar Pattern: Cooperation with a Dash of Friction,” *Comparative Connections* 6, no. 1 (April 2004): 5-7; Bonnie S. Glaser, “Anxiety about Taiwan Hits New Heights,” *Comparative Connections* 6, no. 2 (July 2004): 1, 37-42; Bonnie S. Glaser, “Rice Visits Beijing, but Disappoints Her Host,” *Comparative Connections* 6, no. 3 (October

In 2005, Chinese complaints led Washington to reassure Beijing that it was holding fast to its one-China policy and opposed unilateral changes to the status quo as well as Taiwan independence. Indeed, although the US lobbied China about its anti-secession law, it did not forcefully criticize it. Still, it would not agree to collaborate with China to oppose Taiwanese independence.¹³ Chen's pronouncement in 2006 that he would abolish the National Unification Council (NUC) and National Unification Guidelines (NUG) led China to pressure the US anew. Washington's response was to stress opposition to a unilateral change to the status quo and to press Taipei not to eliminate the NUC and NUG.¹⁴ Between 2007 and March 2008, the Taiwan issue heated up because Chen and his supporters began to talk about independence, a new constitution, and a referendum seeking membership in the UN under the name Taiwan.¹⁵ The US strongly criticized the referendum, calling it a mistake and a unilateral move to change the status quo.¹⁶ Yet, it also backed a greater role for Taiwan in international institutions.¹⁷

Assessment: The similarities between G.W. Bush and Obama are more apparent than the differences. While G.W. Bush was visibly more supportive of Taiwan during his first few years in office, he became less assertive as the Taiwan independence movement began to threaten US in-

2004): 37-41; Bonnie S. Glaser, "Slips of the Tongue and Parables," *Comparative Connections* 6, no. 4 (January 2005): 2-6; Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, 225-26; and Jean-Marc F. Blanchard and Dennis V. Hickey, "Introduction: More than Two 'Sides' to Every Story: An Introduction to New Thinking about the Taiwan Issue," in Blanchard and Hickey, eds., *New Thinking about the Taiwan Issue*, 8.

¹³Bonnie S. Glaser, "Rice Seeks to Caution, Cajole, and Cooperate with Beijing," *Comparative Connections* 7, no. 1 (April 2005): 32; and Bonnie S. Glaser, "China Welcomes Bush and Ponders a U.S. Invitation to be a Responsible Stakeholder," *Comparative Connections* 7, no. 4 (January 2006): 4.

¹⁴Bonnie S. Glaser, "Discord on the Eve of the Bush-Hu Summit," *Comparative Connections* 8, no. 1 (April 2006): 4.

¹⁵Glaser, "Old and New Challenges," 31, 40; and Bonnie S. Glaser, "Two Bilateral Dialogue Mechanisms Manage Friction," *Comparative Connections* 9, no. 2 (July 2007): 35.

¹⁶Bonnie S. Glaser, "Product Safety Plagues the Relationship" *Comparative Connections* 9, no. 3 (October 2007): 4-5; and Bonnie S. Glaser, "Bilateral Stability, but Challenges on China's Borders," *Comparative Connections* 10, no. 1 (April 2008): 3-4.

¹⁷Bonnie S. Glaser, "Chock-full of Dialogue: SED, Human Rights, and Security," *Comparative Connections* 10, no. 2 (July 2008): 14.

terests and raise serious risks. As the GWOT became less intense and the risks of conflict over Taiwan diminished, G.W. Bush became aggressive again, but only to a point. These developments illustrate how the balance of capabilities, balance of needs, and interdependencies can constrain US China policy. Obama has not had to grapple with the same independence forces that G.W. Bush faced since Ma Ying-jeou's PRC policies have been largely cooperative. Thus, it is unclear if his policies here would have differed from G.W. Bush's, although there is no evidence that they would have. In any event, in terms of arms sales, we witness Obama moving from an initially cautious position to one more supportive of arms sales, but, like G.W. Bush, only to a point. The reasons for this pattern are multifold. On the one hand, China's rising capabilities and the US's reduced need for China, as the worst of the 2008 Financial Crisis passed, facilitated more arms sales to Taiwan. On the other hand, the US's continuing need for China to deal with various security issues such as those described below, interdependencies, and the balance of capabilities deterred a more aggressive arms sales posture.

North Korea and Iran

In 2003, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) became an urgent issue for the US because it opted to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Pyongyang's withdrawal was an especially salient matter for the G.W. Bush administration since it was very focused on the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) to American national security, particularly after 9/11. Around the same time, Iran became a more pressing matter for the administration because the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported that Iran was not meeting its NPT obligations regarding its nuclear fuel reprocessing and enrichment activities. Given that China was a long-standing ally of Pyongyang and a weapons supplier and major energy customer of Tehran, it was only natural that Washington would turn to Beijing as part of its strategy for managing these two security challenges.

North Korea: During G.W. Bush's first term, Washington consistently used high-level visits, meetings on the sidelines of other meetings, and various dialogues to lobby China to press North Korea to rollback its WMD program, to stop its uranium enrichment activities, and to desist from provocations. Despite its concern about WMDs and displeasure with Beijing for not exerting greater pressure on Pyongyang, it frequently thanked Beijing for its coordination of the Six-Party Talks (6PTs) and its use of economic and diplomatic tools to bring the hermit kingdom to the negotiating table. There is no evidence that it threatened to sanction or sanctioned China for the latter's relatively mild stance towards the DPRK. Indeed, repeated praise, coupled with occasional reminders about the risks that North Korean policies posed to Korean peninsula peace, were the administration's *modus operandi* from 2000 to 2004.¹⁸

After 2004, the G.W. Bush administration continued to warn that Pyongyang's WMD programs endangered stability on the peninsula and to thank the PRC for its efforts to facilitate the 6PTs. It praised China even though Beijing remained reluctant to impose its own sanctions against or to criticize Pyongyang for repeatedly violating its commitments. Illustrating the "praise policy," when G.W. Bush visited Beijing as part of a tour of Asia in November 2005 he praised China for its help in regard to the DPRK. Similarly, from 2006 through 2008, US representatives highlighted China's positive role as host of the 6PTs and thanked China for its support for (mild) United Nations Security Council (UNSC) statements and sanctions relating to North Korea missile and nuclear weapon tests. Nevertheless, there were two new policy facets between 2004 and 2008: more intensive engagement with China through the dispatch of emissaries and public statements; and an intensification of arguments that Beijing needed to be more responsible and should be able to get Pyongyang back to the bargaining table.¹⁹

¹⁸See, e.g., Glaser, "A Familiar Pattern," 2; Glaser, "Anxiety about Taiwan Hits New Heights," 38-41; Glaser, "Rice Visits Beijing," 39; and Glaser, "Slips of the Tongue and Parables," 2.

¹⁹Glaser, "Rice Seeks to Caution," 30-32; Bonnie S. Glaser, "Disharmony Signals End to

The DPRK quickly forced itself on to Obama's agenda. In 2009, North Korea conducted its second nuclear tests and withdrew from the 1953 Armistice agreement.²⁰ Washington vigorously pressed Beijing to rein in Pyongyang and worked closely with China to help it form an interagency group that could help implement UNSC 1874.²¹ The destruction of the *Cheonan* in March and North Korea's shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in November made the DPRK a central issue in 2010. Washington strongly lobbied Beijing to restrain Pyongyang from further provocative acts and to support condemnation of the DPRK. In the face of China's reticence to criticize and heavily pressure Pyongyang, the US argued China was emboldening the DPRK and being "willfully blind," and debunked the claim that Beijing had no leverage over Pyongyang.²² The US did little more, despite the fact that Beijing went so far as to block reports showing Pyongyang was violating UNSC resolutions.²³ Indeed, the Obama administration continued to make use of G.W. Bush's "praise policy," with various officials thanking, for example, China for its efforts

Post-Sept. 11 Honeymoon," *Comparative Connections* 7, no. 2 (July 2005): 1-3; Bonnie S. Glaser, "Katrina Wreaks Diplomatic Havoc, Too," *Comparative Connections* 7, no. 3 (October 2005): 3-4, 7-8; Glaser, "China Welcomes Bush," 3; Bonnie S. Glaser, "Pomp, Blunders, and Substance: Hu's Visit to the U.S.," *Comparative Connections* 8, no. 2 (July 2006): 3, 14; Bonnie S. Glaser, "Promoting Cooperation, Managing Friction," *Comparative Connections* 8, no. 3 (October 2006): 6-11; Bonnie S. Glaser, "Dialogue Boosts Ties, Even without Results," *Comparative Connections* 8, no. 4 (January 2007): 4; Glaser, "Two Bilateral Dialogue Mechanisms Manage Friction," 44; Glaser, "Product Safety Plagues the Relationship," 14; and Glaser, "Bilateral Stability," 3.

²⁰Bonnie S. Glaser, "Laying the Groundwork for Better Cooperation," *Comparative Connections* 11, no. 2 (July 2009): 5.

²¹*Ibid.*, 11; and Bonnie S. Glaser, "Strategic and Economic Dialogue Sets Agenda for Cooperation," *Comparative Connections* 11, no. 3 (October 2009): 5-6. On UNSC 1874 and 1718, see U.S. Department of State, "North Korea Sanctions: Resolution 1718 Versus Resolution 1874," June 12, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/06a/124709.htm> (accessed December 31, 2009).

²²Glaser, "The Honeymoon Ends," 4-5; Bonnie S. Glaser, "Cooperation Faces Challenges," *Comparative Connections* 12, no. 2 (July 2010): 5-6; Glaser and Billingsley, "Tensions Rise and Fall, Once Again," 3-4; Kathrin Hille and Daniel Dombey, "Boost for US-China Military Relations," *Financial Times*, December 9, 2010; and Bonnie S. Glaser, "Friction and Cooperation in Run-up to Hu's US Visit," *Comparative Connections* 12, no. 4 (January 2011): 1-5.

²³Glaser, "Pomp and Substance," 7-8.

to prevent Pyongyang from forcefully responding to American and/or South Korean military drills.²⁴

Iran: For most of the period between 2000 and 2004, the G.W. Bush government did not elevate the status of the Iran issue in the Sino-American relationship even though the administration was quite worried about WMDs and Iran's role in global terrorism, and American intelligence indicated that Chinese companies had provided missile and WMD equipment, parts, and technology as well as dual-use materials to Iran. Still, Washington repeatedly imposed sanctions on Chinese companies that it deemed were aiding Tehran's missile and WMD initiatives. Moreover, it lobbied Beijing to permit the matter of Iranian WMD programs to be brought up before the UNSC. During G.W. Bush's first four years in office, though, Washington never adopted any truly aggressive postures towards Beijing in order to get the latter to embrace its Iran policy preferences.²⁵

G.W. Bush's second term posture towards China on the Iran issue largely mirrored its first, although it did move in a more assertive direction. It repeatedly pushed China to press Iran to cooperate with international bodies such as the IAEA. It also imposed more sanctions on Chinese companies that were aiding Tehran. However, it did not take strong action against China itself even though many of these companies were repeat offenders.²⁶ Indeed, it later began to employ its "praise policy" to work with China in regard to the Iran issue. For example, it complimented China on its opposition to Iranian WMD programs and willingness to support UNSC resolution 1737 which required Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment activities. From 2004 to 2008, however, Washington was quite displeased with China's continuing arms and technology sales to

²⁴Glaser, "Cooperation Faces Challenges," 5-6; Glaser and Billingsley, "Tensions Rise and Fall, Once Again," 3-4; Glaser, "Friction and Cooperation," 3-5; and Glaser and Billingsley, "Pomp and Substance," 7.

²⁵Glaser, "Anxiety about Taiwan Hits New Heights," 45; and Glaser, "Slips of the Tongue and Parables," 5-7.

²⁶Glaser, "Disharmony Signals End," 3; and Glaser, "China Welcomes Bush," 12.

Iran, and unwillingness to reduce its investment in Iran and support forceful UNSC measures. It criticized China for not supporting stronger action against Iran and called on Beijing to do more to limit Iran's access to materials that aided the latter's WMD and missile programs.²⁷ Beyond lobbying and criticism, the US employed "responsible stakeholder" rhetoric encouraging China to act in a way that was consistent with its growing power and prestige.²⁸

Initial Obama administration dealings with China vis-à-vis the Iran problem were soft, but began to mirror those of the second G.W. Bush administration. For example, in April 2009, Washington banned a Chinese company from doing business in the US because of the firm's involvement in transferring nuclear technology to Iran.²⁹ Seven months later, Obama pressed Chinese President Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) to back an IAEA resolution demanding that Iran stop its uranium enrichment program.³⁰ Obama also lobbied Hu prior to and at the April 2010 Nuclear Security Summit to support stronger UNSC sanctions against Iran.³¹ While Washington was not averse to giving Beijing special deals, administration decision makers also called for China to improve its enforcement of UN sanctions, to avoid taking advantage of others who imposed sanctions, and use its leverage directly on Tehran.³²

Assessment: In regard to G.W. Bush's and Obama's China policy pertaining to North Korea and Iran, it is hard to identify major divergences. G.W. Bush had a relatively tempered policy during his first term and adopted a slightly more aggressive posture in his second. Obama started

²⁷Glaser, "Pomp, Blunders, and Substance," 3-4; Glaser, "Promoting Cooperation, Managing Friction," 6-8; and Glaser, "Old and New Challenges," 33.

²⁸Glaser, "Old and New Challenges," 34.

²⁹Glaser, "Laying the Groundwork for Better Cooperation," 8; "Foreign Ministry: China Opposes U.S. Sanctions on Chinese Companies," February 3, 2009, <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6584832.html> (accessed February 3, 2009); Kathrin Hille, "China Raps US over Curbs on Oil Trader," *Financial Times*, January 15, 2012.

³⁰Bonnie S. Glaser, "Obama-Hu Summit: Success or Disappointment?" *Comparative Connections* 11, no. 4 (January 2010): 5.

³¹Glaser, "Cooperation Faces Challenges," 6.

³²*Ibid.*, 7; Glaser and Billingsley, "Tensions Rise and Fall, Once Again," 8.

off with a soft policy initially and later moved towards a more aggressive position. In neither case did Washington take forceful measures to bring Beijing into compliance with its wishes. The US need for China and China's rising capabilities explains the lack of a forceful push during G.W. Bush's first term. The US's reduced need for China, as the GWOT quieted down, inform us why G.W. Bush later could shift in a harder direction while interdependencies and rising Chinese capabilities explain why the move was bounded. Obama's shift in a slightly more aggressive direction resulted from the US's reduced need for China as the Great Financial Crisis eased while interdependencies, the US's continuing need for China's help in dealing with Pyongyang and Tehran, and the balance of capabilities prevented a more dramatic shift.

Economics

Despite viewing China as a strategic competitor, the G.W. Bush administration's position when it came to economics and trade was that China and the US had a large number of common interests. This undoubtedly flowed from the immense bilateral trade relationship, the huge amount of American foreign direct investment (FDI) in China, and China's increasing prominence in the global economy. The Obama administration had similar reasons for viewing China as a critical economic partner. On top of this, collaboration with China seemed to offer a way out of the morass flowing from the 2008 Financial Crisis. While each administration confronted roughly the same menu of economic problems—e.g., China's currency policies, compliance with its WTO obligations, and industrial policies, they did not necessarily give each of these the same level of attention or employ the same policy responses.

Currency: Although Washington was consumed by matters of war and peace between 2000 and 2004, China's currency policies, which critics charged substantially undervalued the Renminbi (RMB), increasingly captured the attention of the G.W. Bush administration from late 2003 onward. This may be explained with reference to the upcoming 2004

election, China's rising trade surplus with the US, and business and Congressional pressure. The administration's approach to the currency issue and China's unwillingness to modify its policies essentially consisted of private communications and public calls by government decision makers for Chinese currency reform. Not only did the administration shun sanctions against China or the filing of a WTO case relating to China's RMB policies, but it also rejected petitions from domestic groups seeking action against China for its undervaluation of the RMB.³³

China's revamp of its currency system in July 2005 dampened the administration's need to act on the currency issue. However, the limited subsequent appreciation of the RMB, Congressional and interest group pressure, and the 2006 election coupled with the strong performance of the Democrats made the currency issue a big one over the next two years. Washington repeatedly engaged China and was aided by pending legislation such as the punitive Schumer-Graham bill. Yet, it would not embrace hardline tactics and favored dialogue coupled with responsible stakeholder rhetoric.³⁴ On the other hand, the administration did not shy away from criticizing the pace and degree of reform and US Treasury reports often mentioned the need for more extensive Chinese policy change.³⁵ After 2006, Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson shifted attention to China's reform of its financial sector.³⁶ Still, the administration persisted in repeatedly lobbying China about its currency in face-to-face meetings and institutionalized dialogues such as the Strategic Economic Dialogue (SED).³⁷

³³Glaser, "Anxiety about Taiwan Hits New Heights," 42-44; and Glaser, "Slips of the Tongue and Parables," 8.

³⁴Glaser, "Disharmony Signals End," 1, 6-8; Glaser, "Katrina Wrecks Diplomatic Havoc, Too," 9; Glaser, "China Welcomes Bush," 2, 8-10; Glaser, "Discord on the Eve of the Bush-Hu Summit," 1-2; and Glaser, "Product Safety Plagues the Relationship," 5-6.

³⁵Glaser, "Pomp, Blunders, and Substance," 7-8; Glaser, "Dialogue Boosts Ties," 3; Glaser, "Two Bilateral Dialogue Mechanisms Manage Friction," 32-34; Glaser, "Product Safety Plagues the Relationship," 4; and Glaser, "China Signals Irritation with U.S. Policy," 12.

³⁶Glaser, "Pomp, Blunders, and Substance," 8; Glaser, "Promoting Cooperation, Managing Friction," 3; and Glaser, "Old and New Challenges," 35.

³⁷Glaser, "Chock-full of Dialogue," 1-3; Geoff Dyer and Jamil Anderlini, "Paulson Urges

Obama did raise the issue of RMB reform when he visited China in November 2009, but, overall, gave rather modest attention to the currency issue during his first year in office.³⁸ In his second year, this changed, due to strong Congressional and interest group pressure, upcoming mid-term elections, and poor US economic conditions. Rather than relying on bilateral, ad hoc mechanisms, the US actively exploited multilateral and institutionalized bilateral dialogues such as G-20 meetings and the Strategic & Economic Dialogue (S&ED) to pressure China to reform its currency with China, ultimately making promises to allow greater currency flexibility. Nevertheless, Obama, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, and others repeatedly complained about the (unfair) advantages that China derived from its currency, signaled their displeasure with the pace of reform, and portrayed China's currency surplus as detrimental to China and others. While the administration refrained from labeling China as a currency manipulator, it consistently pointed to China's currency undervaluation.³⁹

IPR: Motivated by some of the same domestic political considerations operative in regard to its policies towards China's currency reform, the G.W. Bush administration elevated the salience of China's protection of intellectual property rights (IPR) starting in 2004. It described IPR as the biggest issue in the bilateral trade relationship and the primary source of trade frictions between the two countries. To spur China to do more to enforce IPR and to punish those pirating and counterfeiting foreign goods, it sent a number of high-ranking officials to Beijing to cajole Chinese policy-makers into greater activism. In top leader meetings,

Beijing to Keep Its Currency Strong," *Financial Times*, December 6, 2008; and Glaser, "Ties Solid for Transition," 2.

³⁸Glaser, "Obama-Hu Summit," 5.

³⁹Glaser, "The Honeymoon Ends," 6-7, 10; "US Chooses to Address the Yuan Issue Diplomatically," *China Daily*, April 7, 2010, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2010-04/07/content_9695492.htm (accessed April 7, 2010); Glaser, "Cooperation Faces Challenges," 9-10; Glaser and Billingsley, "Tensions Rise and Fall," 6-7; Glaser and Billingsley, "Pomp and Substance," 5, 12; Bonnie S. Glaser and Brittany Billingsley, "Friction and Cooperation Co-exist Uneasily," *Comparative Connections* 13, no. 2 (September 2011): 4; Bonnie S. Glaser, "US Pivot to Asia Leaves China off Balance," *Comparative Connections* 13, no. 3 (January 2012): 6-7, 12, 14.

face-to-face interactions, and formal economic and trade dialogues, Washington pressed China vigorously to crack down on IPR violations. Whatever the IPR issue, discussion was the favored tactic throughout G.W. Bush's first term in office.⁴⁰

As a result of the aforementioned domestic factors, the G.W. Bush administration began to work harder over the course of 2005 to get China to protect IPR. Various Secretaries of Commerce, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and others made clear in hearings, their visits to Beijing, and diverse communications with their Chinese counterparts that they wanted Beijing to do more to enforce IPR rules. More concretely, US agencies such as the United States Trade Representative (USTR) put China on its Priority Watch List and labeled China one of the world's worst offenders of international copyright laws.⁴¹ The US further pressured China in venues such as the Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade (JCCT) and the SED.⁴² Pressure tactics also were visible in the administration's filing of its first China-related WTO IPR case in April 2007.⁴³

Obama has repeatedly made an issue of the adequacy of China's enforcement of IPR, although he seems to have been somewhat less vigorous than his predecessor. Still, at the May 2010 S&ED and 21st JCCT in Washington in December 2010, the US pressed China to cooperate with it in IPR enforcement. Furthermore, during Hu's visit to the US in early 2011, the S&ED several months later, and the November Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum meeting, the US raised IPR issues numerous times with top Chinese officials, achieving some results in terms of promoting the use of legal software by state-owned enterprises

⁴⁰Edward Leung, "Bush Administration Resists Industry Calls for WTO Case over China's IPR Practices," *HKTDC Research*, March 7, 2005, <http://economists-pick-research.hktdc.com/business-news/article/Business-Alert-US/Bush-Administration-Resists-Industry-Calls-for-WTO-Case-over-China-s-IPR-Practices/baus/en/1/1X000000/1X00DTQV.htm> (accessed December 22, 2012).

⁴¹Glaser, "Rice Seeks to Caution," 29, 33; Glaser, "Disharmony Signals End," 9, 13; Glaser, "Katrina Wrecks Diplomatic Havoc, Too," 8; Glaser, "China Welcomes Bush," 2; Glaser, "Chock-full of Dialogue," 12.

⁴²Glaser, "Promoting Cooperation, Managing Friction," 1-3.

⁴³Glaser, "Two Bilateral Dialogue Mechanisms Manage Friction," 31.

as well as enforcing IPR on the Internet.⁴⁴ Furthermore, it used the 22nd JCCT to reach agreements with China about IPR enforcement and to obtain pledges from China that it would do more to ensure that government offices at all levels used legal software.⁴⁵

WTO: Aside from the issue of China's protection of IPR, between 2000 and 2004, Bush Jr. officials raised numerous other concerns related to China's adherence to its WTO obligations and, to a lesser degree, Beijing's lack of interest/effort in pushing forward the Doha Round of the WTO. With respect to WTO compliance, central US interests included non-WTO compliant Chinese quotas and sanitary standards for agricultural imports, Chinese value-added tax (VAT) policies, and market access barriers for US goods and service providers. During its first three years in office, the administration avoided requesting WTO consultations or the filing of WTO cases. Starting in 2004, however, this changed with the administration's filing in March of its first WTO case against China in regard to China's imposition of a special VAT on semiconductors that were not produced or designed in China.⁴⁶

In July 2006, the G.W. Bush administration filed its second WTO China case, this one relating to Chinese tariffs on imported automobile parts.⁴⁷ Thereafter, it made regular use of the WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM) in regard to trade issues with China. In the first quarter of 2007, it filed a WTO case alleging that China was unfairly subsidizing industries such as information technology, steel, and wood. Not long afterwards, it filed another case over continuing Chinese barriers to the importation and distribution of foreign books, films, and software, which seemed to contravene China's WTO trading and distribution rights

⁴⁴Tan Yingzi, "US to Raise IPR Issues with China," *China Daily*, May 22, 2010, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-05/22/content_9880971.htm (accessed May 22, 2010); Glaser, "Friction and Cooperation," 11; Glaser, "Pomp and Substance," 4-5; Glaser, "Friction and Cooperation Co-exist Uneasily," 4; and Glaser, "US Pivot to Asia Leaves China off Balance," 6-7.

⁴⁵Glaser, "US Pivot to Asia Leaves China off Balance," 8.

⁴⁶Glaser, "A Familiar Pattern," 3.

⁴⁷Glaser, "Promoting Cooperation, Managing Friction," 2.

obligations. The USTR highlighted these WTO cases as nothing more than a reflection of the maturing of the relationship while China viewed Washington's growing usage of the WTO DSM as a sign Washington was turning away from dialogue.⁴⁸ Coupled with a greater number of cases, USTR reports on China's WTO compliance in G.W. Bush's second term began to assume a more critical tone when assessing the degree to which China was fulfilling its WTO obligations.⁴⁹

In late June 2009, the Obama administration filed its first China-related WTO case to deal with Chinese restrictions on exports of raw materials.⁵⁰ Over time it became more aggressive, cognizant of domestic political pressures, the 2010 midterm election, and later the upcoming 2012 presidential election. In September 2010, it filed two new WTO cases, one regarding Chinese restrictions on US credit and debit card companies operating in China and another pertaining to Chinese tariffs on US steel exports to China.⁵¹ September 2012 found it launching a WTO case alleging illegal Chinese auto and auto parts subsidies, supplementing two other cases filed earlier in the year.⁵² USTR reports on China's WTO compliance under Obama did not depart from past practices, raising concerns about China's industrial policies, limits on market access for foreign goods and foreign service suppliers, and fulfillment of its obligations regarding the publication of trade-related laws, regulations, and rules and receptivity to public comment on such laws, regulations, and rules.⁵³ On top of this, the USTR sent the WTO information in order to call attention to hundreds of non-WTO compliant Chinese government subsidy programs.⁵⁴

⁴⁸Glaser, "Old and New Challenges," 34-35; Glaser, "Two Bilateral Dialogue Mechanisms Manage Friction," 31.

⁴⁹Glaser, "Dialogue Boosts Ties, Even Without Results," 2.

⁵⁰Glaser, "Laying the Groundwork for Better Cooperation," 12.

⁵¹Glaser and Billingsley, "Tensions Rise and Fall," 7.

⁵²James Politi, "US Launches WTO Action against China," *Financial Times*, September 17, 2012.

⁵³Glaser, "Obama-Hu Summit," 9; Glaser, "US Pivot to Asia Leaves China off Balance," 5-6.

⁵⁴Glaser, "US Pivot to Asia Leaves China off Balance," 12.

Other: During its first G.W. Bush term in office, the administration did not shy from making use of safeguards, anti-dumping tariffs, and countervailing duties (CVDs) to deal with surges of Chinese electronics, furniture, steel, textiles, and other imports flowing from factors such as China's accession to the WTO, preferential Chinese government policies, and China's currency valuation policies. In February 2004, for example, the Commerce Department imposed anti-dumping tariffs and CVDs on Chinese plastic shopping bags and televisions.⁵⁵ It is clear, though, that the administration was not particularly aggressive about China-related trade issues between 2000-2004, most likely due to its focus on geopolitical matters.

As a result of the termination of global textile quotas, Chinese textile imports jumped into the spotlight during the first year of G.W. Bush's second term. Despite Chinese warnings and threats of retaliation, the US forced a deal with China regarding the imposition of safeguard tariffs on its exports to the US.⁵⁶ In March 2007, the US imposed CVDs on Chinese coated paper imports. This action was particularly noteworthy because it reversed traditional US policy, which rejected imposing CVDs on subsidized goods from non-market economies. It was seen as signaling both the toughening of US policy and the waning of its patience.⁵⁷ Throughout the second half of 2008, the US took steps to allow for or to impose tariffs on Chinese steel pipe.⁵⁸

The Obama administration did not shy away from trade actions to defend US economic interests and placate vocal domestic special interests, even where China raised complaints or threatened/imposed retaliation on American goods.⁵⁹ In April 2009, it started investigations into

⁵⁵Glaser, "Anxiety about Taiwan Hits New Heights," 43.

⁵⁶Glaser, "Rice Seeks to Caution," 34; Glaser, "Disharmony Signals End," 8-9; Glaser, "Katrina Wrecks Diplomatic Havoc, Too," 9; and Glaser, "China Welcomes Bush," 10.

⁵⁷Glaser, "Old and New Challenges," 34; and Glaser, "Two Bilateral Dialogue Mechanisms Manage Friction," 43.

⁵⁸Glaser, "Chock-full of Dialogue," 15.

⁵⁹Examples can be found in Glaser, "Strategic and Economic Dialogue," 4, 8; Glaser, "Obama-Hu Summit," 9; and Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, 212.

Chinese steel pipes used in energy drilling, eventually imposing tariffs in December.⁶⁰ Five months later, it imposed safeguard tariffs on Chinese tire imports, something the G.W. Bush administration had declined multiple times to do, and two months after this it imposed penalties on Chinese salts and coated paper imports.⁶¹ 2010 and 2011 found the administration quite vigorous in pursuing cases of Chinese dumping and government subsidies. Among other moves, it imposed tariffs and CVDs on or made adverse findings about Chinese steel, steel gratings, drill pipes and collars, copper tubes and pipes, and aluminum exports.⁶²

Assessment: During the first G.W. Bush administration, Washington's stance towards China on a variety of the enumerated economic matters was rather passive. This was a function of the administration's need to focus on the GWOT. In G.W. Bush's second term, while domestic factors eventually drove the administration to challenge China more aggressively on all the aforementioned issues, it is important to recognize that the space for this only existed because of the de-intensification of the GWOT. Even then, the administration's need for China to deal with problems such as Iran, interdependencies, and China's increasing capabilities limited the amount of US pressure. As in many other spheres, the Obama administration initially did not push China hard in the economic realm. However the persistence of problems, coupled with domestic pressures, spurred it to become more assertive. Nevertheless, structural constraints such as those cited in preceding sections prevented it from seriously challenging China on economic issues. It is important to note that G.W.

⁶⁰Glaser, "Laying the Groundwork for Better Cooperation," 9; Glaser, "Obama-Hu Summit," 9.

⁶¹Glaser, "Strategic and Economic Dialogue Sets Agenda for Cooperation," 1, 7-8; "Tire Tax would Weaken Sino-US Trade," *People's Daily Online*, September 16, 2009, <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6758559.html> (accessed September 16, 2009); and Glaser, "Obama-Hu Summit," 14.

⁶²Glaser, "The Honeymoon Ends," 12; "US Sets Penalties on Chinese Copper Pipe, Tube," *China Daily*, May 5, 2010, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-05/07/content_9819325.htm (accessed May 6, 2010); Glaser, "Cooperation Faces Challenges," 13; Glaser and Billingsley, "Tensions Rise and Fall," 16; and Glaser and Billingsley, "Pomp and Substance," 12.

Bush's and Obama's China policies regarding economic problems were constrained, as well, by the rules of the WTO, which limited not only what the US could challenge, but how it could challenge China.

Human Rights

As with all US administrations of the post-Tiananmen era, Presidents G.W. Bush and Obama have paid considerable attention to China's human rights. At the macro level, American concerns have focused on themes such as freedom of speech, association, and religion. In terms of more narrow issues, Washington has been interested in Chinese policies pertaining to Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong's political and civic life, individual human rights activists, and specific human rights issues such as China's censorship of Google's search results. The analysis below compares G.W. Bush and Obama in regard to the aforementioned general human rights issues and the specific issue of Tibet.

General: The G.W. Bush administration's initial tactic for dealing with China's human rights shortcomings was to focus on narrow cases. Thus, in 2003, it opted not to sponsor a resolution condemning China's human rights practices at the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). A major factor explaining Washington's stance was the US's need for stable relations with China while it was embroiled in the GWOT. As well, the realpolitik-minded G.W. Bush administration was not predisposed to focus on human rights issues. Even so, the US continued with its annual reports on human rights in China and submitted a resolution on China's human rights situation to the UNCHR in 2004 (something it had not done for three years), perhaps because of the upcoming 2004 election.⁶³ Nevertheless, the reality was, as one observer wrote, "US complaints about China's human rights record haven't been too sharp in Bush's first term."⁶⁴

⁶³Glaser, "A Familiar Pattern," 4.

⁶⁴Glaser, "Rice Visits Beijing," 43.

As with many other issues, the US became more willing to press China on human rights as geopolitical circumstances moderated, although the level of pressure should not be exaggerated. For instance, in 2005, Washington did not propose a UNCHR resolution condemning China's human rights practices, and in 2007, G.W. Bush accepted China's invitation to attend the Olympics, which some viewed as Bush turning a blind eye to China's human rights practices. To be clear, Washington was not silent. On numerous occasions between 2005 and 2008, administration officials showed concern about human rights in China by attending church services in Beijing, raising freedom of religion and Internet censorship with their Chinese interlocutors, and raising the cases of and meeting with Chinese dissidents. Prior to his November 2005 trip to China, G.W. Bush applied further "pressure" on China by lauding democracy in Taiwan and Japan. Beyond this, the US Department of State reports on human rights and religious freedom continued to focus attention on China's human rights deficiencies.⁶⁵

Initially, it did not appear that the Obama administration would pay much attention to human rights. During her first visit to China in 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that while the US should be frank about human rights with China it could not let such issues "interfere with the global economic crisis, the global climate change crisis, and the security crisis."⁶⁶ From 2009 onward, however, Washington consistently engaged Beijing on human rights issues. It issued critical reports about China's human rights and the lack of religious rights, and signified its concern for human rights through church visits by officials touring China and public support for and meetings with Chinese human rights activists like Liu Xiaobo (劉曉波). In addition, it leveraged public speeches and

⁶⁵Glaser, "Rice Seeks to Caution," 30; Glaser, "Disharmony Signals End," 1; Glaser, "Katrina Wrecks Diplomatic Havoc, Too," 3; Glaser, "China Welcomes Bush," 2; Glaser, "Pomp, Blunders, and Substance," 2-3, 9, 13; Glaser, "Old and New Challenges," 40; Glaser, "Product Safety Plagues the Relationship," 4; Glaser, "Bilateral Stability," 4, 10; and Bonnie S. Glaser, "Olympics Boost Chinese Pride and U.S.-China Relations," *Comparative Connections* 10, no. 3 (October 2008): 3-4.

⁶⁶Glaser, "A Good Beginning Is Half Way to Success," 2.

summits, bilateral human rights dialogues, and high-level institutionalized dialogues such as the S&ED to voice its concerns about assorted human rights issues.⁶⁷ Regardless, the US managed its disputes with China over human rights issues such as dissident Chen Guangcheng's (陳光誠) treatment in a tempered fashion.⁶⁸

Tibet: While security imperatives limited how hard G.W. Bush pushed China on human rights, the administration never moderated its support for Tibet. In fact, in 2003, both G.W. Bush and Colin Powell met separately with the Dalai Lama and expressed concern to Chinese leaders about Tibet.⁶⁹ Approximately two years later, Rice told her Chinese interlocutors that they should reach out to the Dalai Lama.⁷⁰ In 2007, G.W. Bush met with the Dalai Lama in Washington.⁷¹ Following massive riots in Tibet in 2008 and China's use of coercion to quell the uprising, the US did urge restraint, dialogue, and negotiations with the Dalai Lama, but G.W. Bush proved unwilling to take stronger measures such as cancelling his visit to the 2008 Olympics.⁷²

Regarding Tibet, while Obama did not meet with the Dalai Lama during his first year in office since such a meeting would have occurred soon before he undertook his first trip to China, he did send White House and State Department representatives to meet with the Dalai Lama in

⁶⁷Ibid.; Glaser, "Obama-Hu Summit," 13; Mark Landler, "Clinton and Geithner Face Hurdles in China Talks," *New York Times*, May 24, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/25/world/asia/25diplo.html> (accessed May 24, 2010); Mark Landler, "U.S. Is Not Trying to Contain China, Clinton Says," *New York Times*, January 14, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/15/world/asia/15diplo.html> (accessed January 14, 2011); Glaser, "Friction and Cooperation in Run-up to Hu's US Visit," 7, 15; Glaser and Billingsley, "Pomp and Substance," 4, 14; "Hillary Clinton: China Crackdown 'a Fool's Errand,'" *BBC News*, May 10, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-13353199> (accessed May 10, 2011); and Glaser and Billingsley, "Friction and Cooperation Co-exist Uneasily," 5.

⁶⁸Jamil Anderlini, Kathrin Hille, and Geoff Dyer, "Tussle over Chen Hits Fragile China-US Ties," *Financial Times*, May 2, 2012.

⁶⁹U.S. Department of State, "Report on Tibet Negotiations," June 23, 2004, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rpt/34266.htm> (accessed December 21, 2012).

⁷⁰Glaser, "Disharmony Signals End," 3.

⁷¹Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, 133.

⁷²Glaser, "Bilateral Stability," 2; and Glaser, "Olympics Boost Chinese Pride," 2.

India.⁷³ The next year in February as well as the following year in July, Obama met with the Dalai Lama. While supporting Tibetan rights, unique cultural features, and dialogue between Beijing and the Dalai Lama's representations and rejecting Chinese demands to discontinue meetings, it should be noted that both of Obama's meetings with the Dalai Lama took place in a low-key fashion and without media coverage.⁷⁴

Assessment: When there were countervailing geopolitical exigencies (e.g., the GWOT or the global financial crisis), both G.W. Bush and Obama seemed to have adopted relatively soft tactics towards China in regard to human rights issues. Under both presidents, Washington pushed harder as structural conditions changed and provided an opening to challenge China more assertively on human rights. Yet the fact remains that neither president employed sanctions or the threat of sanctions to prod China to make changes in its human rights practices, even when Beijing forcefully cracked down on dissent in areas like Tibet or domestic actors in the US pressed for more forceful US stances on China's human rights policies. Sino-American interdependencies and the balance of capabilities, among other variables, shed light on these similarities in spite of other differences between the two administrations.

Doctrines

This section explores the China "doctrines" that Presidents G.W. Bush and Obama adopted over the course of their administrations. These doctrines include the labels used to describe the Sino-American relationship, the broad policies that each administration favored to manage bilateral interactions, and the military posture each President advocated towards China.

⁷³Glaser, "Strategic and Economic Dialogue Sets Agenda for Cooperation," 12.

⁷⁴Daniel Dombey, "China Hits at Obama's Dalai Lama Meeting," *Financial Times*, February 18, 2010; Glaser, "The Honeymoon Ends," 5, 8-9; and Glaser and Billingsley, "Friction and Cooperation Co-exist Uneasily," 8-9.

The G.W. Bush administration initially labeled China a strategic competitor and concluded that the US should focus on traditional allies such as Japan, make new friends, and speed up its military modernization.⁷⁵ The 9/11 attack led to a near *volte face* by Washington as it sought better relations with Beijing to limit distractions, to legitimate the GWOT, and to facilitate its activities in Southwest Asia. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and problems such as North Korea gave added impetus to cooperation with China. Aside from wanting Chinese support in the UNSC, the administration hoped China would directly influence problem states.⁷⁶ It speaks volumes that whereas US Vice President Dick Cheney in early 2004 highlighted differences between the US and China, Secretary of State Powell, at the end of 2004, highlighted the breadth and depth of agreement.⁷⁷

2005 saw the G.W. Bush administration shift away from its strategic competitor language. Instead, it began to call China a “stakeholder,” which implied that China was an important member of the international system with various obligations related to preserving the system.⁷⁸ During her Secretary of State confirmation hearings, Rice stated that the administration’s policy towards Beijing was to build a “candid, cooperative, and constructive relationship with China that embraces our common interests, but recognizes considerable differences about values.”⁷⁹ The notion of a duality appeared again when Secretary of Defense Robert Gates went to China in November 2007 and spoke about China as a competitor and partner.⁸⁰

Even before he took office, Obama called Hu to note his desire to “build a positive and constructive” bilateral relationship and when Clinton

⁷⁵Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, 126, 150-53.

⁷⁶Glaser, “A Familiar Pattern,” 8; Taylor, “US-China Relations after 11 September”; and Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, 153-54.

⁷⁷Glaser, “Anxiety about Taiwan Hits New Heights,” 39; and Glaser, “Slips of the Tongue and Parables,” 1.

⁷⁸Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, 144.

⁷⁹Glaser, “Rice Seeks to Caution,” 29.

⁸⁰Glaser, “China Signals Irritation with U.S. Policy,” 5.

went to China in February 2009 she described the US and China as being in a common boat and said the US and China should have a “positive, cooperative, and comprehensive relationship.”⁸¹ Moreover, US policy-makers repeatedly informed China that there were many opportunities for cooperation.⁸² At the first S&ED in July and during his visit to China in November, Obama emphasized that China and the US could partner to meet common challenges and that the US did not fear China’s rise.⁸³ In the wake of China’s adverse reaction to the elevation of Asia in American grand strategy, Washington went to considerable lengths to assure China that the US was not trying to contain it and that the two countries had many common interests.⁸⁴

Still, from late 2010 onward, the administration was clearly giving greater attention to bilateral differences and asserting US interests more forcefully. Moreover, it not only rediscovered, echoing G.W. Bush, a place for traditional allies such as Japan and South Korea, but also could be witnessed courting new allies such as India and Indonesia to push China into a more cooperative stance on climate change, exchange rates, proliferation, trade, and the South China Sea. Department of Defense reports, the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), and statements by Gates about American military plans made quite clear concern about China’s military modernization, intentions, and opacity.⁸⁵

⁸¹Glaser, “A Good Beginning Is Half Way to Success,” 1-2.

⁸²Glaser, “Laying the Groundwork for Better Cooperation,” 7.

⁸³Daniel Dombey and Sarah O’Connor, “US Seeks Closer China Ties,” *Financial Times*, July 27, 2009; Glaser, “Strategic and Economic Dialogue Sets Agenda for Cooperation,” 1-2; and Glaser, “Obama-Hu Summit,” 2.

⁸⁴Ma Liyao, “China, US Trade Barbs over Military Ties,” *China Daily*, June 7, 2010, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-06/07/content_9940191.htm (accessed June 7, 2010); Glaser, “Friction and Cooperation in Run-up to Hu’s US Visit,” 4-6; and Landler, “U.S. Is Not Trying to Contain China, Clinton Says.”

⁸⁵Helen Cooper, “U.S. Starts to Push Back against China,” *New York Times*, February 1, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/01/world/asia/01china.html> (accessed February 2, 2010); Mark Landler and Sewell Chan, “Taking Harder Stance toward China, Obama Lines Up Allies,” *New York Times*, October 25, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/26/world/asia/26china.html> (accessed October 25, 2010); Glaser and Billingsley, “Tensions Rise and Fall,” 1-2, 6.

The shift in American doctrine towards a harder line towards China was most vividly embodied in Clinton's November 2011 enunciation of an American "strategic pivot" to Asia that involved inter alia "strengthening bilateral security alliances; deepening our working relationships with emerging powers...engaging with regional multilateral institutions; expanding trade and investment; forging a broad-based military presence."⁸⁶ Thereafter, the US moved in quick succession to build up its military relationship with Australia, to participate more vigorously and at higher levels in the APEC forum, the East Asia Summit, and other APR regional institutions, and to enhance its ties with Japan and Korea. It also worked to build new or strengthen links with India, Indonesia, and the Philippines and launched discussions about a new pan-Asian trade pact, the Trans-Pacific Partnership.⁸⁷

It is debatable how much of the pivot is new, to what extent the pivot is directed towards China, and the degree to which concrete political, military, and economic steps will be taken to bring to fruition the rhetoric associated with the American rebalance. It has been argued that the pivot is not new, representing nothing more than a continuation of previous administrations' recognition of the APR's strategic and economic importance. It has been pointed out that the rebalance is not directed solely at or primarily at China, but reflects a mix of international and domestic political factors ranging from the aforementioned significance of the APR to the need to identify a new overarching foreign policy strategy in the wake of the winding down of the GWOT to Obama's APR roots, and that there is no dramatic political, military, or

⁸⁶Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy*, November 2011.

⁸⁷Geoff Dyer, Richard McGregor, and David Pilling, "US Shifts Policy Focus to Asia Pacific," *Financial Times*, November 15, 2011; David Pilling, "How America Should Adjust to the Pacific Century," *Financial Times*, November 16, 2011; Kenneth Lieberthal, "The American Pivot to Asia," *Foreign Policy*, December 21, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/12/21/the_american_pivot_to_asia (accessed April 29, 2013); Geoff Dyer, "China and US Create Less Pacific Ocean," *Financial Times*, February 12, 2012; and Suisheng Zhao, "Shaping the Regional Context of China's Rise: How the Obama Administration Brought Back Hedge in Its Engagement with China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 21, no. 75 (May 2012): 369-89.

economic substance behind the pivot.⁸⁸

Assessment: G.W. Bush and Obama administration doctrines about China started with quite dissimilar baselines with the former stressing competition and the latter cooperation. Over time, however, G.W. Bush began to recognize China as a country that was a competitor and partner. Even so, this recognition was stronger during the height of the GWOT rather than after its de-intensification. As for Obama, his administration has come to put greater stress on differences and to treat China more as a potential competitor. Nonetheless, we cannot conclude at this point that there has been a pronounced shift in a more confrontational direction. Indeed, external factors such as interdependencies and the balance of capabilities seem to preclude it. One might argue, too, that domestic structures such as the balance of pro- and anti-China groups in the US prevent any dramatic doctrinal shifts.

Theoretical and Policy Observations

The theoretical import of this study is that the external structure enables/constrains the policies that presidents can adopt regardless of their ideologies, perceptions, and party affiliations. To be clear, structure does not determine the policies that presidents follow, as specific policies result from a mix of external structures, the “clarity” of external structure, preferences and ideologies, domestic actors, and the “stateness” of leaders.⁸⁹

⁸⁸Ralph Cossa and Brad Glosserman, “Return to Asia: It’s Not (All) about China,” *PacNet*, no. 7, January 30, 2012; Zhao, “Shaping the Regional Context of China’s Rise”; Malou Innocent, “Talk of a U.S.-Asia ‘Pivot’ Is Overblown,” *U.S. News & World Report*, December 13, 2012, <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/world-report/2012/12/13/talk-of-a-us-asia-pivot-is-overblown> (accessed December 24, 2012).

⁸⁹Jean-Marc F. Blanchard and Norrin M. Ripsman, “A Political Theory of Economic Statecraft,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 4, no. 4 (October 2008): 371-98; and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell, and Norrin M. Ripsman, “Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy,” in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 1-41.

This study shows, too, that external structural factors mediate the impact of domestic political forces on US policy. For example, Sino-American economic links coupled with WTO rules limited the aggressiveness with which G.W. Bush and Obama could pursue Chinese currency reform even though various domestic groups such as manufacturers and unions lobbied both presidents heavily to take more forceful action.

Moreover, domestic structures impinge upon the salience of domestic political forces. For example, during the time period considered herein, domestic political pressures were less salient, albeit not irrelevant, because of *inter alia* the president's primacy in the making of foreign policy, clashing priorities among members of Congress and interest groups, the desires of the party in power in Congress to support the President, divisions among interest groups, and the structure of power in Congress.⁹⁰

It may be argued that Obama moved to the "middle"—i.e., a centralist position featuring non-extreme cooperative and conflictual strategies—from an initially soft position not because of structure, but because of China's rising assertiveness. This is part of the explanation, but insufficient.⁹¹ First, it does not tell us why Obama did not shift to a point more akin to where Bush Jr. was positioned during his early years in office. The answer lies in structural constraints. Second, it is not just China's level of assertiveness that changed, but also its relative capabilities.⁹² These rising capabilities prompted a US reaction. Third, the US's need for China diminished as it began to recover from the nadir of the 2008 Financial Crisis. Fourth, "events" such as North Korean belligerence, coupled with the muted results from US moderation, conspired to push Obama back to the middle. Fifth, China's assertiveness largely relates to specific issues such as the South China Sea and thus has trouble illumi-

⁹⁰David Skidmore and William Gates, "After Tiananmen: The Struggle over U.S. Policy toward China in the Bush Administration," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 514-39; and Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, 125-36.

⁹¹Suisheng Zhao notes a variety of incidents and pushbacks that gave the Obama administration incentives to move towards the middle. See Zhao, "Shaping the Regional Context of China's Rise," 373-74, 378-83.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 380-83.

nating Obama's move to a harder line almost throughout the entire policy spectrum.

The policy implication flowing from this article is that it likely to be a waste of time or energy, *ceteris paribus*, to pursue new policies towards China that are at the extremes of conflict or cooperation. Put differently, the US should not push hard because of structural constraints. From the vantage point of Chinese America watchers, there should be an expectation, absent major structural changes or extreme events, that American policy towards China will move back towards the middle if initially hostile (as was the case during G.W. Bush's first few years in office). Likewise, it will move back towards the middle if initially effusive and overly warm (as was the case during Obama's first few years in office).

Conclusion

China policy has been a vital US foreign policy issue for decades, but the expansion of ties, Washington's rising need for China, and the institutionalization of economic relations have made China policy increasingly complex. The purpose of this article has been to compare G.W. Bush's and Obama's China policies. It finds not only that there are few major differences between the two (quite different) presidents, but indeed that there are quite a few similarities. This gravitation towards the middle flows from the structure of US-China relations, conceptualized in a sufficiently broad way to accurately illuminate not only what transpired, but also G.W. Bush's and Obama's China-related economic policies.

This study has various limitations. First, it does not tackle some issues such as the South China Sea and Diaoyu Islands disputes that have thrust themselves onto Obama's China agenda over the past two years or so. This is not because these issues are trivial, but because they provide a better basis for comparing Obama's China policies over the course of his two terms, rather than comparing his policies with G.W. Bush's. Second, this study does not undertake a quantitative comparative analysis. One could, for example, compare the number of WTO cases filed, the number

of institutionalized dialogues, or the frequency with which China was mentioned in State of the Union addresses. Quantitative analysis, though, has many limits.

Future studies comparing Obama's and G.W. Bush's China policies (or the China policies of other presidents) may profit from focused analyses of particular types of cases or issues. For example, they could assess how the two presidents reacted to crises such as the 2001 EP-3 incident, China's 2007 ASAT weapons test, or China's harassment of and interference with US navy vessels in the South China and Yellow Seas in 2009. Turning to issues, future studies could look at White House stances on China-related high-technology export controls, Chinese foreign aid to developing world regions such as Africa or Latin America, or China's policies towards Afghanistan and Pakistan.

China is rising and is becoming more assertive. It no longer listens, but lectures. It no longer tolerates US anti-dumping tariffs and WTO cases, retaliating, almost automatically, with its own investigations, barriers, or WTO cases. And its pushback about American links with Taiwan is becoming more forceful. Yet, as this study makes clear, US China policy under G.W. Bush and Obama remains similar across multiple dimensions. In assessing one of these presidents' China policy, one observer wrote that, although numerous problems remain such as currency, Iran, and human rights, "dialogue has deepened on strategic and economic issues; cooperation on regional security issues has increased . . . a difficult and potentially dangerous period . . . was managed effectively; and cooperation between the US and Chinese militaries has expanded."⁹³ Which president is this? You fill in the blanks.

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⁹³Glaser, "Ties Solid for Transition," 7.

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