

# Voice of America Interview with Peter Hayes The Korea Question and US-China Relations

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## Recommended Citation

"Voice of America Interview with Peter Hayes The Korea Question and US-China Relations", Special Reports, November 19, 1999, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/voice-of-america-interview-with-peter-hayes-the-korea-question-and-us-china-relations/>

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VOICE OF AMERICA: "ISSUES IN U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS"

SUBJECT: THE KOREA QUESTION AND U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS

MODERATOR: JOHN KAMM

PARTICIPANTS: PETER HAYES and SCOTT SNYDER

Monday, November 1, 1999

Tape Transcription

MR. KAMM: Welcome to "Issues In U.S.-China Relations." This is your host, John Kamm. And on today's show, we'll be examining the timely topic of "The Korea Question and U.S.-China Relations" with Dr. Peter Hayes of the Nautilus Institute and Mr. Scott Snyder of the U.S. Institute of Peace.

Nearly 50 years ago, war broke out on the Korean Peninsula between the forces of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the combined armies of the Republic of Korea and the United Nations under the leadership of the United States.

In a matter of months, China's People's Liberation Army joined the fray on the side of the Koreans, the North Koreans.

The Korean conflict was one of the bloodiest of the century. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, 54,000 American troops were killed, and more than 8,000 soldiers are still listed as missing in action.

An astonishing 1 million Chinese troops are said to have lost their lives, as well as 1.3 million South Koreans, mostly civilians, and an estimated 500,000 North Koreans. The housing stock and the industrial base of the peninsula were reduced to ashes. One of the Chinese casualties was a son of Chairman Mao, so the tragedy of this conflict was felt at the very highest level in China, and even

today, the bitterness and grief that the Korean War gave rise to have not fully subsided, as the reaction to recent allegations of wartime massacres by American troops have shown.

Without question, the fighting between Americans and Chinese in Korea marked the low point of relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China in this century, but today, cooperation between the two countries in reducing tensions on the Korean Peninsula is often hailed by officials of both countries as one of the most important successes of the policy of what some Americans call "constructive engagement."

China is today working with the U.S. to try to bring about a permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula. It is arguably the only country, certainly the only major country in the world which has excellent relations with both North and South Korea.

It houses tens of thousands of refugees from the terrible famine that has wracked North Korea, and it is a major supplier of food and fuel to the north, and it enjoys a booming trade with South Korea, and in some parts of China, notably in Shandong Province, South Korean firms are the largest investors.

Recently, William Perry, former Secretary of Defense of the United States, completed a report on American policy towards North Korea at the request of President Clinton.

The report, which recommends a new approach to Pyongyang that couples economic and political incentives with a high degree of military preparedness, has the following to say about China:

"China's concerns with North Korean nuclear and ballistic missile programs are in many ways comparable to U.S. concerns. While China will not coordinate its policies with the United States, the Republic of Korea, and Japan, it is in China's interest to use its channels of communication to discourage the DPRK from pursuing these programs."

Despite cooperative efforts between China and the United States, there are still many critics in Washington who distrust China and who argue that Beijing isn't really using its leverage with Pyongyang to curtail the North Korean nuclear and multilateral programs.

Some even charge that China has actually assisted the north in developing intercontinental missiles, and that it has helped open certain markets for weapons in the Middle East for Pyongyang.

Other say that China isn't doing enough to help the North Korean refugees on its soil, in some cases even repatriating them.

Some Members of Congress think that Beijing is turning a blind eye on the diversion of its food and fuel aid from the civilian population to the north's military establishment.

So today, we'll be examining the positive and the negative aspects of the Korean question with two of America's leading experts on Northeast Asia, Dr. Peter Hayes of the Nautilus Institute and Mr. Scott Snyder of the U.S. Institute of Peace.

Peter Hayes is co-executive director of the Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development, which is a non-governmental policy research and advocacy group based in Berkeley, California.

He has been active as an environment and energy consultant in developing countries, and has written widely about security affairs in the Asia- Pacific region. He has visited the DPRK six times.

Welcome, Peter Hayes.

MR. HAYES: Good morning, John. How are you?

MR. KAMM: Very good. Thank you for coming on the show.

MR. HAYES: Pleasure.

MR. KAMM: Scott Snyder is an Asia specialist at the U.S. Institute of Peace. He has written extensively on Korean affairs and has recently completed a study for the Institute of Peace entitled *Negotiating on the Edge: North Korean Negotiating Behavior*. He's been following China's policy towards the Korean Peninsula very closely, and has made three trips to Beijing this year alone, to explore the subject. Thank you, and welcome, Scott Snyder.

MR. SNYDER: Thanks for inviting me.

MR. KAMM: I'm going to start with a very general question. To the extent that China acts in concert with the United States to reduce tensions in Korea, is it motivated, in your opinions, largely out of its own self-interest, or is it motivated principally by a wish to improve relations with the United States? Let me start with Scott Snyder.

MR. SNYDER: Well, I believe that it's really a combination of self-interest and desire to pursue a cooperative relationship with the United States. There has been, I think, a fairly good consistency or complementarity in short-term interest in stability on the Korean Peninsula between the United States and South Korea -- I mean, between the United States and China.

However, the accidental Embassy bombing in Belgrade did reduce the level of overt cooperation between China and the United States towards the Korean Peninsula.

MR. KAMM: That's an interesting observation. We often hear of other elements of the relationship that have been affected by the Belgrade bombing. You're saying that it has also affected our ability to work together with China on Korea?

MR. SNYDER: I think that officials in Beijing have continued to be quietly cooperative. It is one area of the relationship that was preserved from the ramifications of the Embassy bombing.

MR. KAMM: Yes.

MR. SNYDER: However, the enthusiasm for cooperation, I think, can be described as passive cooperation, rather than active cooperation, at the time, and I think most notably, there will be no overt support for U.S.-led efforts outside of the four-party talks.

MR. KAMM: Peter, your comments on that.

MR. HAYES: Well, from a geopolitical perspective, I think it's clear that the relationship with the United States is more weighty and more important than the relationship between China and North Korea, and indeed North Korea is a vital interest of both parties, in large part because of how it affects China and the United States relationship with each other.

And indeed, as Scott points out, when there is more tension or more difference in the relationship between Beijing and Washington, one tends to see a warming up of relationships between Beijing and Pyongyang, but the reality is that the relationship between North Korea and China is not a particularly friendly one, in spite of the amount of Chinese blood that was spilled during the Korean

War.

And I think that the ultimate question of the Perry report, the outcome of the Perry report and whether the policy initiatives proposed in there actually are implemented, the ultimate test will be whether or not the United States and China can coordinate their actions towards North Korea, because these two great powers are ultimately the determining ones with respect to North Korea's future.

MR. KAMM: Yes. You would agree with my introductory comments, though, that China has excellent relations both with the south and the north, and can play a role there, too?

MR. HAYES: Actually, I think that China has excellent relationships with the south, with an underlying condition, a conservative center of gravity on both sides with respect to their ultimate military intentions with respect to the north.

MR. KAMM: Yes.

MR. HAYES: But China badly needs South Korean investment and trade and finance, and so I think there's a, you know, a certain contradictoriness towards the relationship with the south.

But there is also ambivalence in the relationship with the north. I mean, the reality is that many high-level North Koreans thought themselves betrayed by China when China recognized the south without ensuring the cross-recognition of the north by the United States and other parties, but especially the United States.

And so, while on the surface, there is the strong declaration of friendship and there are the very strong bonds between the military that go back, and party officials that go back to the Korean War, inherent in the relationship is a good deal of antagonism.

And at this point, in my view, China is the great power that ultimately is keeping North Korea standing up in the face of famine and fuel shortages at this point, not the United States. It's actually China who holds much more power with respect to what North Korea can do.

But again, one should not overstate the kind of influence that the Chinese have in Pyongyang. Our Chinese colleagues often say to us that Americans think that they have much more power in Pyongyang to influence North Korean decisions than they really have.

MR. KAMM: Well, you're actually anticipating a question in a few minutes, and I want to return to that. But from an informational standpoint right now, and bearing in mind my audience, as well as myself, I might add, Scott Snyder, the Korean War ended with a cease-fire agreement. There's never been a peace treaty.

I understand that there are some talks underway to replace that cease-fire agreement with a peace treaty. Can you update us on the status of those talks?

MR. SNYDER: Sure. The four-party talks, as they are known, include both North and South Korea and the United States and China in a discussion about how to move from the current armistice to a more permanent peace.

Those meetings have been held on a quarterly basis in Geneva, for almost two years now, and unfortunately, the meetings themselves have not made much progress.

There are two subcommittees that have been formed, one to look at how to implement confidence-

building and tension-reduction measures, and the other one to look at how to move from the armistice to a more formal peace settlement.

However, the agenda itself has been stymied by the North Korean insistence that also the issue of U.S. presence on the Korean Peninsula, the U.S. military presence on the Korean Peninsula be a part of the initial topic for discussion, and that is something that the United States and South Korea primarily have not accepted as a demand, as a part of the agenda for those talks.

MR. KAMM: So the last of these quarterly discussions took place when, and when is the next round?

MR. SNYDER: I believe the last rounds took place in August, and I have not yet heard when the next round is scheduled to take place.

MR. KAMM: Peter, has a date been fixed, do you know?

MR. HAYES: To my knowledge, the date is still up in the air. The Berlin talks on missiles, the bilateral talks, I think will convene next, in the near future, and that will lead, if things go well, to bilateral U.S.-DPRK high-level diplomatic exchanges, and I think on the American side, if we go down that path, that will pave the way or set the scene for a resumption of four-party talks.

But I don't think anyone who has been involved in those talks -- you know, the North Koreans, South Koreans, the United States, or China -- began it under any illusion that progress would be rapid.

I think everyone understood that the -- both the negotiating styles and the inherently antagonistic interests of the different parties would take a great deal of time to resolve.

And so the fact is, the United States and South Korea, and to a large extent China, would like to see incremental progress, incremental steps to build transparency and confidence, and the North Korean side would like to have a much more rapid progress on the essential political and diplomatic questions that affect how it is perceived around the world and how it perceives its own identity, and those two approaches to the negotiations are really quite contrary.

But behind the scenes -- and I think Scott would probably confirm this, sitting in Washington -- behind the scenes, there's a lot of side talk going on in the corridors about more practical issues, and the four-party talks have given China, especially, a very important seat at the table, and China has been very influential in keeping those talks going through some quite conflictual and turbulent periods over the last two years.

MR. KAMM: Scott, do you want a quick followup on that?

MR. SNYDER: Yes. It's clear that China has an interest in seeing these talks move forward, and that they are in a position to play an important role in facilitating those talks.

I might just add one thing about the context. From the North Korean perspective, one issue is the issue, an old issue of cross-recognition, the fact that the South Koreans now have relationships with China and Russia, but North Korea has not been able to develop a normal relationship with the United States.

I think that that is clearly one of the issues that, from a North Korean perspective, has inhibited their willingness to pursue four-party talks in a more constructive way.

MR. KAMM: Yes. This is John Kamm. The show is "Issues in U.S.-China Relations." I'm speaking with Mr. Scott Snyder of the U.S. Institute of Peace and Dr. Peter Hayes of the Nautilus Institute.

Peter, Scott just mentioned, and I'm sure you would agree with this, that certainly the issue of U.S. troops in South Korea is a very big issue, and every year, in fact, the United States does stage joint exercises with South Korea. I believe they're underway now. This is obviously something Pyongyang deeply resents.

What about China's attitude towards the presence of U.S. troops in South Korea? If the Americans were to pack up and leave, would tensions mount? What might Japan do in that eventuality?

MR. HAYES: Well, again, I think you have to distinguish between the short-term interests and the long-term interests as viewed from the different capital cities when you address the issue of U.S. troops in South Korea.

Even in North Korea, there are powerful figures in the party who believe it is actually in the interest of North Korea for the short term that the American troops stay exactly where they are, precisely because they have a rare politik view of the world, and they look out and see themselves surrounded by very large powers -- China, Russia, and most importantly, Japan -- and they have long memories, of course, of the role, the historical role of Japan in the early part of the century, through the end of World War II.

So I think much the same view is found in China, that in the short term, there is a valuable contribution to regional stability from the forward deployment of American forces.

The problem, from the Chinese perspective, is how this is linked to the future role of the Japanese military on the one hand, and the future regional and global role of China in relation to the United States, on the other.

I think we are still very much at an open crossroads as to whether this will be a more cooperative security framework in which the great powers will collaborate, coordinate, communicate to manage many of the regional issues together, or whether we will be in a more combative confrontational great power geopolitical game in the region.

And I don't think that it's at all clear to the Chinese what the United States intends in this regard, and events like the Kosovo bombing or the expansion of the range covered by the U.S.-Japan defense treaty and the role envisaged for Japanese military forces in that treaty arrangement are very problematic for China, though I think it's in this bigger context that the U.S. troops in South Korea are viewed.

In the short term, there is an issue of keeping the peace on the peninsula, which is in the vital interests of all parties; in the longer term, the future of those troops is linked to the bigger picture of security relationships in the region, especially with regard to Japan.

MR. KAMM: Scott, switching gears a little bit, and now talking about something that happened in August of last year, namely what appears to have been the North Korean missile test, an intercontinental missile test. Now, at the time, though, that significantly raised tensions, and certainly Japan, among others, was extremely concerned; yet Beijing refused to criticize Pyongyang, instead seemed to accept the explanation that a satellite was being put into space, and even defended the country's right to launch satellites.

From your perspective over there in Washington, didn't China's support for Pyongyang there fuel the critics' suspicions that Beijing has been involved in the North Korean missile program?

MR. SNYDER: Well, let me just say first that, in this respect, being in Washington and outside the range of whatever North Korea may launch may give a slightly different perspective from the way it

might have looked in Beijing.

I think that it is true that there are suspicions here in Washington about the nature and extent of the Chinese relationship with North Korea. A lot of these perspectives, I think, really are more derived from the overall atmosphere in the U.S.-China relationship.

MR. KAMM: Mm-hmm.

MR. SNYDER: How do Americans look at China? Do they look at China with suspicion, or do they look at China as a country that is really seeking stability in order to continue economic development?

So I think that the suspicions about China's relationship with North Korea probably have less to do with what China has said about North Korea's testing.

In many respects, it's quite understandable that China, as an old friend of North Korea, would not publicly criticize North Korea. Rather, I think it has something to do with the political nature of the U.S.- China relationship.

MR. KAMM: Yes. Peter, I want to return now to a point you made earlier, which concerns the widespread perception in this country that China has great influence over Pyongyang, that China could simply threaten to cut off food and fuel and bring North Korea to heel; and yet, as you've pointed out, it's important not to exaggerate China's influence over the north.

MR. SNYDER: Would you care to elaborate?

MR. HAYES: First, let me just make a comment on the missiles tests, John.

MR. KAMM: Yes.

MR. HAYES: I think that one of the problems that the North Korean rocket fired over Japan presented to the Chinese was a perfect excuse for those in the United States who would like to deploy theater missile defenses in the region, aimed not so much at North Korea, although that is publicly what is stated, but much more, in fact, at China, and bearing heavily on the issue of the Taiwan-China issue.

MR. KAMM: Yes.

MR. HAYES: And so I think much of what was said publicly may not have accorded what was communicated privately between Beijing and Pyongyang on this issue. There was great displeasure in Beijing with Pyongyang for firing the rocket, and stirring that pot in Washington.

MR. KAMM: Yes. Yes.

MR. HAYES: The problem with such a threat from China to cut off the food and fuel and bring North Korea to its knees is twofold.

First of all, if China were to do that, North Korea could, indeed, collapse, and collapse could mean up to two or three million North Korea refugees flooding, not south, but across the border to China.

MR. KAMM: Yes.

MR. HAYES: And this is not a prospect that China relishes. It could also devolve or implode into first a form of civil war in the north, and then possibly a North-South war involving the United States,

and this would be a very dangerous problem for North Korea -- excuse me -- for China, a war on its doorstep, as it was in 1950. And so I think that China wishes to avoid that possibility, by all means possible. So it, in short, is not a very credible threat to say to the North Koreans, "If you don't do what we say, we will bring you to your knees and stop you in your tracks."

On the other hand, China does have the power to expand beyond the survival rations that are provided today to the North Korean system, it can expand and contract that amount of aid likely.

MR. KAMM: Yes.

MR. HAYES: And I believe that the calculus is to keep North Korea standing up, so that it doesn't collapse, but not allow it to become a vigorous, or reinvigorated adversary, which would greatly upset South Korea, the United States, and Japan, all parties that China wishes to cooperate on, both with respect to Korea and with respect to much more important issues for China at a regional and global level.

MR. KAMM: Yes.

MR. HAYES: So again, it's a very delicate balance for the Chinese to keep this relationship intact, as warm and friendly as possible, given the circumstances, but to not upset the other players in this game, and --

MR. KAMM: So really, more reliance, if you will, on carrots than threats of sticks.

MR. HAYES: That's correct. And I think that, also, political status and face is very important -

MR. KAMM: Yes.

MR. HAYES: -- to both sides, and for this reason, you know, one sees various delegations going backwards and forwards, and, you know, the reality is that someone from North Korea, with approval, can go to China without a visa.

MR. KAMM: Yes.

MR. HAYES: That tells you something about the historic relationship between the two parties.

MR. KAMM: I'm also wondering if you'd include the recent decision by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to allow North Korea to open a consulate in Hong Kong.

MR. HAYES: Well, I think that there are a number of reasons that that may have come to pass, but one of the issues for China is the relationship between North Korea and Taiwan, and this little trade, investment, and financing relationship is --

(End of Side A.)

MR. HAYES (continuing): -- and this was a real slap in the face for China from Pyongyang. They were offering to do this for hard cash, of course, with the Taiwanese.

MR. KAMM: Yes.

MR. HAYES: So, you know, allowing the North Koreans a certain international role and a certain status the presence, I think is very important, and I think the Chinese are very skilful at doing that.

MR. KAMM: This is John Kamm. The show is "Issues in U.S.-China Relations." I'm speaking with Dr.



Peter Hayes of the Nautilus Institute and Mr. Scott Snyder of the U.S. Institute of Peace, on the question of Korea and U.S.- China relations. We're moving into the final third of our program here. Scott, I'd like to focus a bit on the famine and how that has entered into the relations of the various countries we're talking about. Back in the early 1960s, thousands of Chinese refugees went into North Korea fleeing some disastrous policies in China. Now, 30 years later, we find thousands of North Koreans in China. How is China dealing with that situation? And I'm going to draw this out a little bit. Again, I hate to put you in the spot, being the fellow in Washington. But there have been charges that food relief is being diverted, and is this an element in China's very complicated, I'm sure, equation of dealing with the north on the famine?

MR. SNYDER: Well, the North Korean food crisis has, I think, presented a real dilemma for China, and I think that in the initial stages, the Chinese Government has attempted to be supportive. Peter has indicated the Chinese interest in keeping North Korea afloat, under these conditions. There has been a lot of interaction across the border between China and North Korea, both in terms of North Korean refugees coming across to look for food, and in terms of Chinese assistance, crossing in the other direction to provide food and other resources to stabilize the situation in North Korea. The issue of diversion of food does not directly affect the Chinese strategy or policy toward food aid to North Korea, because most of its assistance has been bilateral and informal, relying heavily on the ethnic Korean community to provide assistance to relatives living in North Korea. There is an issue for some U.S. policymakers, about whether international food aid is being diverted to the military or to places that are not monitored, that has been revived by a recent, contested report from the General Accounting Office.

MR. KAMM: Yes.

MR. SNYDER: I believe that perhaps the biggest significance in that story lies in the fact that policy toward North Korea continues to be contested here in Washington, but it's not an issue that directly concerns the Chinese. Let me just say one thing, also. I was just on the border in July, and I think that the situation in that region has stabilized as a result of the fact that there is now food in North Korea available through markets. It doesn't mean that hunger still doesn't occur, because the distribution system is very poor inside North Korea, but it does mean that there are fewer refugees coming across at this time. However, we also know that refugees to China are influenced by seasonal issues.

MR. KAMM: Yes.

MR. SNYDER: And I think that we can expect or anticipate another increase as the winter progresses.

MR. KAMM: I have seen widely diverging estimates of the number of refugees in China at any given time, really an extraordinary range. Do you have a handle on that at all?

MR. SNYDER: Well, that is very difficult to get a handle on. I think perhaps -- well, the Chinese Government says less than 10,000. Some South Korean NGOs say over 300,000.

MR. KAMM: Yes.

MR. SNYDER: When I was there, local people were saying 100,000, but of course they, also, are not in a position to count.

MR. KAMM: Yes.

MR. SNYDER: So it remains unclear exactly how many have crossed over into China.

MR. KAMM: Peter, I'd like your comments on this debate that Scott just referenced. I might add I've been following it on your institute's excellent web site. I read the exchange, not really an exchange, but Congressman Gilman's statement and Congressman Tony Hall's statements. What's your read on this? Is this really just politics at work, or are there real questions here about whether the food is getting to the children of North Korea?

MR. HAYES: I think it's clear that the bulk of the food is getting through to the children of North Korea. There is sufficient monitoring going on, with I think nearly 50 monitors in place, and a variety of cross-cutting techniques to confirm that food is getting in place, not just the monitors in the field, that the food is getting to the right people. However, the issue of transparency is very important in North Korea, and I think what has been noted over time is the greatly increasing transparency. More and more counties and provinces are being opened up for monitoring and for visitors to go there; more and more information about North Korea is coming out to many different channels. And I think that provided that again, face is kept and the people do not use the information in a political way, information these days is far more forthcoming than has been in the past, so the question is not just the absolute amount of information but also the trend.

And I think what the critics of food aid and the fuel aid and, indeed, the whole Perry initiative strategy of cooperative engagement with North Korea have a hard time explaining are the cooperative aspects of the relationship and the rapidly expanding cooperation, which is not just, I should say, between the United States and North Korea, but in some instances involves China directly. In our own wind power project in North Korea, our Chinese partners, non-governmental partners in Beijing, arranged for the shipment of a variety of electrical equipment that was needed to complete the project, because American equipment is at a different voltage.

MR. KAMM: Yes.

MR. HAYES: They procured the equipment, they got it to us in the field, in the village, in time, and then, in May-June this year, they conducted two specialized study tours on wind power economics and technology for the North Korean rural energy study tour that came to the United States for training and for briefing; and so we had a trilateral cooperation going on there at the non-governmental level. And there were similar activities going on with training of North Koreans in areas such as commercial law; on improved agricultural technology in North Korea; on greenhouse, winter crop technology between China and North Korea; on improved boiler efficiency, which, you know, is very important to reduce the amount of waste in the use of coal in buildings, in keeping people alive in the winter. There's a very vibrant cooperative relationship between the Institute of Thermo-Physics in Beijing, with its counterpart in Pyongyang. So there's a lot going on, both bilaterally and trilaterally, that's cooperative, and this is something that simply doesn't fit in the picture that simply looks at North Korea only as an adversary.

And so in my view, there's a tremendous amount of learning going on between the different parties, and it's still unclear where, ultimately, we will end up in this set of evolving relationships, but I think it is at least possible that there will be a peaceful rapprochement, ongoing coexistence, and slow movement towards the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula with very careful management of this process from outside by the United States and China.

MR. KAMM: Scott, we really have time for just one more question, and Peter has really, I think, concluded his own remarks very well. I'm going to ask you essentially a question that derives from what he said. Do you agree that, in fact, the United States and China are cooperative, very quietly but very effectively, to move towards a significant reduction of tensions in the Korean Peninsula?

MR. SNYDER: I think the United States and China are cooperating, but very quietly, and not

publicly, and I think that this is really the basis for expanding possibilities for greater strategic dialogue between the United States and China. This is one of the few areas where it is possible for there to be progress in the near term, and I think that those sides are quietly trying, despite many difficulties, to take advantage of that opportunity.

MR. KAMM: Well, gentlemen, you've done, I think, a service to the people of both countries, the United States and China, by describing that cooperation. One of the problems with quiet cooperation is that it is quiet, and that very often, I don't think, the people of the two countries -- certainly in this country, and I imagine in China as well -- know that the United States and China are working to the extent that they are, in this very critical area. This has been an extraordinary show. Thank you so much, Dr. Peter Hayes and Scott Snyder, for joining me on this edition of U.S.-China relations.

MR. HAYES: Thank you, John.

MR. SNYDER: Thank you, John.

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Nautilus Institute

2342 Shattuck Ave. #300, Berkeley, CA 94704 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:

[nautilus@nautilus.org](mailto:nautilus@nautilus.org)