U.S. AND CHINA IN THE EARLY 21ST CENTURY: COOPERATION, COMPETITION OR CONFRONTATION?

Recommended Citation

When China and the United States entered the 21st century, the nature and the future of Sino-U.S. relations once again became questionable. The limited consensus of the two governments on building a constructive cooperative relationship was broken by the Bush Administration. Ten years after the end of the Cold War, the nature of Sino-U.S. relations is still uncertain and unstable. Although many people define them as "strategic partners," the term is not accurate or correct. The terms "strategic competitor" or "strategic rival" have been used in past several century incorrect terms in which to define the relationship today or in the future because it is against reality. Confrontation is too costly to be adopted as a policy option even if there is the danger of limited Sino-U.S. confrontation over Taiwan. And besides, the U.S. is the only country in the world that has the ability to contain China. The relationship between China and the United States is characterized by cooperation and competition. In the past, there has been no definite agreement about fundamental national interests. Therefore, the real meaning behind "strategic partnership" is cooperation. Therefore, the United States and China can still build a cooperative relationship in the new century without being a "strategic partner" if partnership is not a welcomed term. There is no better choice between the two countries in the 21st century. China and the United States are the two countries that have the most cooperative and competitive relationship. Strategic partnership is not a welcomed term. There is no better choice between the two countries in the 21st century. The only political and economic cooperation between the U.S. and China is characterized by cooperation and competition. There are no significant differences between the leaders, politicians and strategists who do not fully understand the new world, the new century, and the new China. It is time to abandon the old thinking and models of "geostatecraft," "zero-sum game," and "balance of power" in order to establish new relations in the new century.

The recent spy plane incident and the showdown between China and the U.S. clearly suggest that the two countries are badly in need of both strategic assurance and specific management in their relations.

I. PARTNERSHIP AND COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP

At the beginning of the new century and the new American administration, China and the U.S. face strategic choices: Will we choose cooperation in the new century and build a cooperative and competitive relationship? Or will we choose confrontation or competition? These are questions and concerns of traditional relations among great powers, following the pattern of traditional relations among great powers.

The problem started with the concept of "building toward a cooperative strategic partnership." In the Joint Declaration of the United States and China issued on October 29, 1997, during President Jiang Zemin's visit to the United States, the two sides declared that "peace, stability and prosperity in Asia and the world are the shared goals of China and the United States, which the two countries should work toward together," and that China and the United States meet the challenges from the international arena, promote world peace and development, and work together to build a cooperative strategic partnership.

Since then and until early 2000, the leaders and important government officials from both countries repeatedly stated that the two countries would develop their relations along this line.

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