US-CHINA RELATIONS FACE BOTH CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Recommended Citation

Among the many challenges facing the U.S. and China, deterrence to deploy missile defense systems and handling the Taiwan issue are two of the potentially most divisive and dangerous. Both will demand high-level attention by Chinese and American leaders. It is important that the two sides approach these challenges with an open mind and a willingness to engage in substantive dialogue. Both sides should also be ready to work constructively on a broad range of other issues, including non-proliferation and economic cooperation. This is not to say that the two sides will not continue to disagree or that all issues can be resolved. However, it is important that the two sides work toward a framework that will allow them to manage their differences constructively.

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Taiwan represents the most sensitive and potentially the most explosively issue in Sino-American relations. For Beijing, the U.S. attitude and policy toward the Taiwan issue embodies the essence of the U.S. intentions toward China and determines the overall state of Sino-American relations. The intensification of Chinese concern over Taiwan over the past several years that Taiwan is drifting toward independence has combined with heightened Chinese suspicions that the U.S. seeks to indefinitely prolong the separation of the two sides. These concerns reflect Beijing's perception that the U.S. government is not genuinely committed to a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue.

Preparation for a Bush-Jiang summit, which may be part of an extended tour of China made by the new U.S. president, should begin early. Beijing should not wait for the U.S. to begin identifying areas where progress can be made and new agreements should be reached. Indeed, both sides should begin to construct an agenda for the Bush-Jiang summit. This is particularly true in the area of non-proliferation. The U.S. and China should begin to examine areas where a new cooperative framework could be established that would allow them to manage regional strategic stability and advance non-proliferation objectives. It is important that both sides be willing to engage in substantive dialogue.

China has declared its intent to build and deploy both national and theater missile defense systems. The president and his staff are firmly committed to moving American defense planning beyond the Cold War. They do not feel that it is necessary to continue to rely on mass-destruction and nuclear retaliation. They also argue that even to declare itself a very different defense strategy to deal with what they see as a very different era. Efforts are underfoot to preclude U.S. ideas that fundamentals have been redesigned. U.S. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi have both argued for a new, non-nuclear U.S.-Japanese security relationship.

The decision by the Bush administration to sponsor a resolution at the UN Human Rights Commission condemning China's record indicates that the United States will not shy away from criticizing Chinese human rights violations. Beijing should resist this trend. The Chinese government is committed to continuing its efforts to improve human rights in China. The U.S. government should recognize these efforts and not use human rights as a basis for advancing its strategic objectives. If the U.S. and China can begin to engage in substantive dialogue on non-proliferation, then it should be possible for both sides to develop a new cooperative framework that will allow them to manage their differences constructively.

The uncertain and unstable relationship between Taiwan and the PRC represents a dangerous security risk for the United States. From the perspective of the United States, any outcome of the dispute between Beijing and Taipei will be as long as the differences are resolved peacefully. Secretary of State Colin Powell stated in his confirmation hearings on January 17: "We will not allow a war between Taiwan and Peking to tear apart our economic partnership. We will not allow a war between Taiwan and Peking to create a vacuum in the Pacific, which is the key to the entire Sino-American relationship." He added, "We will not allow a war between Taiwan and Peking to create a vacuum in the Pacific, which is the key to the entire Sino-American relationship.

While there is no leverage to be gained over the United States through such linkage, especially with the new team in charge in Washington. Beijing should be aware that China is not an enemy, and our challenge is to keep it that way by reasoning with them in the role of, by exposing to them the positive forces of a free enterprise system and democracy, so they can see that this is the proper direction in which to go.

China must now adopt to the new rhetoric of the Bush administration and work with Washington as before to maximize cooperation, manage friction and promote peace and stability generally as well as in the Asia-Pacific region. Both the U.S. and China should encourage and build on other areas of agreement and common interest, which are often left unutilized.

TWO CHALLENGES FACING CHINA AND THE U.S.

U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS FACE BOTH CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

China should adhere to and fulfill its commitments made in November last year to not export nuclear-capable missiles or their technologies and strengthen export controls on missile-related items. If China is perceived to be fulfilling these obligations, this will provide a major breakthrough in Congress and help the Bush administration's efforts to forge a new consensus on Taiwan policy. Conversely, evidence that Beijing is abiding by its non-proliferation commitment will help to reduce concerns in Taiwan over the United States' willingness to defend it.

China remains concerned that the deployment of missile defenses will promote strategic stability, undermine efforts to curb the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and neutralize China's strategic deterrent, and harm Chinese attempts to promote the development of cross-Strait trade and economic cooperation, thus serving Chinese and U.S. interests in easing tensions between Taipei and Beijing and promoting reconciliation between the two sides of the Strait.

China should remain committed to non-proliferation principles. China has publicly declared its intention to become a member of the NPT, and has not transferred nuclear technology to any other country. Beijing should also make clear that it will not sell other countries technologies that could be used to build weapons of mass destruction. China has publicly declared its commitment to non-proliferation principles.

TAXAN

Building China's trust in the United States will require the firmness of resolve by both sides. But it will also require patience, flexibility, and commitment to finding a common ground. It will require the two sides to engage in substantive dialogue and seek to bring those to fruition. Both sides should focus on issues where bilateral interests overlap and cooperation is possible. Expectations should not be set too high on either side to avoid perceived failures and subsequent disappointment. The broad-based interest in bilateral relations this year should be to achieve enough progress to allow a new framework to be established.

Within the context of mutual goals, both sides should consider new advances to deepen their strategic partnership in the non-proliferation sphere. China's membership in the Missile Technology Control Regime remains uncertain, and the United States and China should seriously consider the steps that would make it eligible for membership. The United States and China should also consider ways to strengthen their cooperation on non-proliferation, including counter-proliferation measures.

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