IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEW U.S. ADMINISTRATION FOR EAST ASIA: A CHINESE VIEW

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REDEFINING CHINA-U.S. RELATIONS

Since the intrusion shifted the view of China-U.S. relationship from a hope of constructive strategic relations to a type of strategic competitor, it has clearly divided a line between itself and the Clinton Administration in dealing with China. Honestly speaking, when President Jiang and Clinton met in Washington in October 1997, and declared to build together a constructive strategic partnership toward the 21st century, there was no intention to exclude anybody. Indeed, China never excludes anybody as a potential trading partner. Clearly, as a matter of fact, Clinton's hope for such a relationship had been moving away from the realm of wishful thinking. As such, their bilateral relations deserve particular care. By nature Sino-U.S. relations were, and still are, vulnerable to various challenges. After all China and U.S. have vast difference in terms of social and political systems. Such vulnerability has been fully demonstrated since the declaration of the “constructive strategic partnership”. President Clinton was under attack for his “failure” of engagement with China. He was thought to mislead, as simply the strategic partnership didn’t exist. In the aftermath ofhosting Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999, the term of strategic partnership seems to have almost vanished from political dictionary of both states.

A somber look at the bilateral relations would suggest that although a strategic partnership is much desirable, it might indeed not have been a reality, simply because of the U.S. sales weapon to Taiwan. Unless such weapon transfer to a part of China would end, a strategic partnership definition is impossible. The two countries can at any time be held hostage and be forced to show down by Taiwan if it would announce independenc. Then, without an existing strategic partnership, Washington and Beijing are still possible to engage in strategic cooperation. There are many strategic issues in which they share common interests: stabilization situation of Korean Peninsula, stemming proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, controlling spread of missiles, etc. Actually the two countries have collaborated in these areas in the past decade. For instance, they worked effectively in response to nuclear weapon tests in South Asia in 1998. Although China and U.S. do not have a strategic partnership, it is a heuristically reasonable approach to view them as a strategic partnership. However, to point out the strategic competition between China and the U.S., it views their relations too much simplistically. Sino-U.S. relations are more complex than simply a strategic competition or a strategic collaboration can indicate. Obviously, in terms of Sino-U.S. relations, the Bush Administration has taken a more strategic approach than the Clinton Administration in the Sino-U.S. relations.

This said, the same strategic competition would lead to the U.S. and China to adjust those parts of the policies that undermine American interest and destabilize Sino-U.S. relations. East Asia will be better off if the new U.S. political relations with the U.S. will be further weakened. None of these would improve security situation in East Asia. The U.S. possesses the most powerful conventional and non-conventional offensive means. The Bush Administration has distinguished itself by strongly advocating the build-up of ballistic missile defense system. George W. Bush has chosen Donald Rumsfeld as his Pentagon chief, for Rumsfeld’s hallmark of strong proponent of missile defense. Bush’s propensity for missile defense, nation-wide and theater-wide, as again indicated in his speech delivered at National Defense University on May 1, has created a division of opinions in East Asia. For its part, Beijing has vehemently opposed such defense, considering it most negating to China’s limited strategic defense and for its bilateral relations independent from the U.S. missile defense system. Beijing does not believe it is being safe if the U.S. steps in China’s domestic affairs. Not only does the missile defense have harmed China, its campaign declaration of “defending China” bodes ill for Sino-U.S. relations. During the Presidential campaign, George W. Bush committed to the aid of Taiwan’s security. He has even repeated this commitment since assuming the Presidency. Given White House’s decision of arms sale to Taiwan this spring, Washington’s relationship with Beijing would have been further deteriorated. Looking from Beijing, such three issues, redefine strategic linkage, transfer of advanced conventional weapon to Taiwan, and determined development and deployment of missile defense system -- have exposed their relations to significant pressures. In the following, this article will briefly analyze the impact of these issues on East Asia security, with a particular focus on Sino-U.S. relations.

DEFENDING TAIWAN

Neither Washington nor Beijing is an island nation. Taiwan is an important aspect of the U.S. to balancing military powers across Taiwan Straits. The Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 mandated U.S. right to intervene to the Taiwan crisis at a time, and to sell arms to Taiwan at peacetime. From 1979 to 2002, 99% of Taiwan has been transferred to arms warrants more than 40 billions. Since China and the U.S. “normalized” their relations, the U.S. has taken special care to maintain China’s autonomy. Taiwan fanatics have hardly ever asked for war. The Bush Administration has taken one step further: it decided in April that the U.S. would sell arms to Taiwan this year for at least 4 billions, doubling the annual average sale of the past two decades.

On the other hand, Taiwan is the Chinese island nation of the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of China. The Chinese island nation of the People’s Republic of China is the mainland of China. The Chinese island nation of the Republic of China is Taiwan. In this context, the U.S. may need urgent assistance to provide Taiwan with self-defense arms (ASW capability, ii) theater missile defense (TMD) system, and iii) air force superiority with third-generation jet fighters. Given China’s strong opposition, Washington has decided not to equip Taiwan with Aegis-class destroyers, a platform for Aegis radar system that can detect attack missiles, coordinate and command the battle. Washington has also declared to sell Taiwan more advanced F-16s. This is the Bush Administration annual meeting of April discussing arms sale of the year. In the future, the U.S. weapons sale to Taiwan can be more quickly requested as long as Taiwan perceives a need. The Bush Administration’s decision of arms sale to Taiwan will enhance the U.S. influence, and the China-U.S. relations will move closer to ICRM. The stepping up of the U.S. arms sale to Taiwan reflects the hardliner position of the Bush Administration of its first few months. Consequently this stance will be viewed negatively by Beijing, and arms race across Taiwan Straits will ensue. Under this circumstance, “peace” in East Asia seem to be under external influence is fragile and can’t last. With Mandala China’s growth, military imbalance would not be long in favor of Beijing. Some experts believe and U.S. will come true in less that a decade. After all, arms sale doesn’t equip Taiwan with fundamental self-defense. It increases rather than defuses resentment of Chinese people toward U.S. government.

MISSILE DEFENCE AND SECURITY

In recent years, a dividing issue between China and the U.S. is missile defense. China’s claims new threat from “countries of concern” (previously termed as “rogue” states). At theater level, the U.S. armed forces are equipped with advanced missile detection and defense. The U.S. Air Force has equipped with THAAD already. However, China claims that the new threat from “countries of concern” will not affect Sino-U.S. relations. In this context, the U.S. is not interested to be caught by the Bush Administration’s strategic deterrence, and risking their bilateral relations as the defense system is perceived to embolden the pro-independence force in Taiwan. Missile defense is also viewed to promote a sense of security for Taiwan, and the U.S. military presence in the region will be increased. This gives the U.S. a more readily available means to play the game of weapon sales to Taiwan.

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Looking from Beijing, such three issues, redefine strategic linkage, transfer of advanced conventional weapon to Taiwan, and determined development and deployment of missile defense system -- have exposed their relations to significant pressures. In the following, this article will briefly analyze the impact of these issues on East Asia security, with a particular focus on Sino-U.S. relations.

To be sure, no country in the world should be subject to missile threat. In this context, the U.S. fear of missile attack on it needs to be studied, and perhaps deserves sympathy. This said, the same strategic competition would lead to the U.S. and China to adjust those parts of the policies that undermine American interest and destabilize Sino-U.S. relations. East Asia will be better off if the new U.S. political relations with the U.S. will be further weakened. None of these would improve security situation in East Asia. The U.S. possesses the most powerful conventional and non-conventional offensive means. The Bush Administration has distinguished itself by strongly advocating the build-up of ballistic missile defense system. George W. Bush has chosen Donald Rumsfeld as his Pentagon chief, for Rumsfeld’s hallmark of strong proponent of missile defense. Bush’s propensity for missile defense, nation-wide and theater-wide, as again indicated in his speech delivered at National Defense University on May 1, has created a division of opinions in East Asia. For its part, Beijing has vehemently opposed such defense, considering it most negating to China’s limited strategic defense and for its bilateral relations independent from the U.S. missile defense system. Beijing does not believe it is being safe if the U.S. steps in China’s domestic affairs. Not only does the missile defense have harmed China, its campaign declaration of “defending China” bodes ill for Sino-U.S. relations. During the Presidential campaign, George W. Bush committed to the aid of Taiwan’s security. He has even repeated this commitment since assuming the Presidency. Given White House’s decision of arms sale to Taiwan this spring, Washington’s relationship with Beijing would have been further deteriorated. Looking from Beijing, such three issues, redefine strategic linkage, transfer of advanced conventional weapon to Taiwan, and determined development and deployment of missile defense system -- have exposed their relations to significant pressures. In the following, this article will briefly analyze the impact of these issues on East Asia security, with a particular focus on Sino-U.S. relations.