No. 79 (7/98) CAPS

NEW WORLD ORDER AND A NEW U.S. POLICY TOWARD CHINA

by

Professor James C. Hsiung

Faculty of Social Sciences
Lingnan College
Hong Kong
April 1998
NEW WORLD ORDER AND A NEW
U.S. POLICY TOWARD CHINA

CAPS and CPPS Working Papers are circulated to invite discussion and critical comment. Opinions expressed in them are the author's and should not be taken as representing the opinions of the Centres or Lingnan College. These papers may be freely circulated but they are not to be quoted without the written permission of the author. Please address comments and suggestions to the author or the series editors.
Professor James C. Hsiung is the Head of Department of Politics and Sociology and Chair Professor of Political Science, Lingnan College, Hong Kong.

Faculty of Social Sciences
Lingnan College
Tuen Mun
Hong Kong
Tel : 2616 7429-32
Fax : 2591 0690
NEW WORLD ORDER AND A NEW
U.S. POLICY TOWARD CHINA*

James C. Hsiung

Professor of Politics & International Law, New York University;
[Visiting] Chair Professor & Head, Politics Dept., Lingnan University, Hong Kong

Introduction

This lecture addresses the new (post-1997) China policy of the United States. But, since Washington's policy towards China is largely tied to its perceived strategic interests in Asia Pacific, which in turn are tied to its global concerns, it is incumbent upon us to begin with a brief assessment of the new world order following the close of the Cold War, as it affects American regional and global interests.

Elsewhere, I (see Hsiung 1993, ch. 1) have identified three cardinal characteristics of the new world order: (a) multipolarity, (b) decline in the salience of nuclear weaponry, and (c) rise of geo economics.

In reference to East Asia and, for that matter, Asia Pacific as a whole, it means that, in the multipolar world, China has the potential of being a strategic center of gravity (a "pole") and a major player in the regional -- even global -- balance of power.

While the value of the U.S. nuclear umbrella in the post-Cold War world may increasingly become questionable, Asian countries including former allies will have to fend for themselves, falling back on national means of defense. The resultant arms race among some Asian states (Klare 1993), coupled with the return of conventional deterrence,\(^1\) puts a big question mark on the prospect of regional stability. In contradistinction to Europe, whose

---

* This paper is the text of a lecture given in Singapore under the auspices of East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore, March 23 1998.

\(^1\) In IR (international relations) theory, conventional deterrence has a much less success rate than nuclear deterrence (see Mearsheimer 1988). If 19th century can serve as a guide, conventional deterrence has no better than a 37% chance of success (cf. Alexandroff).
security is buttressed by well-established institutions such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Western European Union (WEU), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Asia has no comparable mechanisms to take care of its collective security. If there is any merit to the democratic-peace theory, the weak democratic tradition in Asia only adds to the worries of U.S. strategic planners. What is worse, the rise of anti-U.S. sentiments, as typified in the unceremonial eviction of U.S. naval forces from the Subic Bay in the Philippines in 1992, has weakened the case the United States can make for its continuing military presence in the region. Domestic pressures have been building up both in and outside Congress for reducing U.S. troop levels in Asia Pacific to below 100,000 soldiers in total (current total is 85,000). Washington, in other words, needs a new pretext for staying on as the area’s protector and patron saint.

In the age of geoeconomics, when a country’s economic security outweighs its military security, East Asia, especially when joined by Southeast Asia, will be catapulted to the forefront of world politics, simply because of the area’s phenomenally growing economic clout. Washington has reasons to worry, lest a regional hegemon hostile to the United States should emerge to challenge its interests in the area. Purely through the geoeconomic lens, Asia Pacific is both a promise and a peril. While the region offers an opportunity for US business and investment, it also accounts for a lion’s share of the $169 billion US trade deficit (1997 figure). In this same geoeconomic light, if nothing else, the United States policy toward China, therefore, is inseparable from US policy toward the Asia Pacific at large.

While domestic politics is divided between Congress and the White House, generally along partisan lines, President Bill Clinton’s all-out engagement policy toward China, announced shortly after he began his second term in office, is aimed at fostering a Sino-US partnership for the twenty-first century. Below, I shall explain that this policy came at the end of three separate policy reviews conducted since Clinton's first term. Here, though, I would like to note that the rationale of the new China policy is in keeping with the requirements of the new world order, to meet the challenge posed by the three attributes identified above. As is often noted, US policy toward China has followed two opposing pulls since 1972: When guided by the strategic dictate, Washington would treat China as an ally in its own contention with an even more ominous threat, such as the former Soviet Union. But when the human-rights issue or other considerations won out, China would end up being a rogue state or,
worse still, an enemy of the United States (cf. Wing Wan 1997). When geoeconomic considerations entered into the picture, China would be seen as a threat or challenge, in its own right, to America’s economic security (witness the $50 billion deficit in America’s trade with China!). Beginning with his second term, however, Clinton opted to follow the strategic pull (Wing Wan, p. 249), for reasons I shall explain in due course.

Policy Reviews Toward China

In fact, Washington’s overall review of the new world order, with particular reference to U.S. interests and needed policy adjustments, began in 1990 under the Bush Administration. While it was prompted by the fall of East European Communist regimes and the collapse of Soviet power, it also coincided with the height of the post-Tiananmen sanctions enforced by the United States and other industrial powers against China. Congressional hostility toward China continued well into the first Clinton Administration after 1993. Partly for that reason, and partly because Clinton took his mandate seriously as he won on a “it’s the economy, stupid” platform, he was preoccupied with domestic economic recovery, to the neglect of other important matters, including his China policy. The three successive China policy reviews during his first term were all conducted under insurmountable pressures either from Congress or from unexpected turns of events, as we shall see below.

<> The first review (1993-1994). In the summer of 1993, Congress passed a resolution urging the Administration to intervene to scuttle Beijing’s bid for hosting the 2000 Olympics. What the Administration did in regard to this non-binding “sense of Congress” resolution was unknown. So was the extent to which the United States could have its weight felt, even if it intervened. The fact, however, is that the International Olympic Committee, in a vote taken shortly after, that is, in September, rejected Beijing’s application (Blackman 1993, at 39). Two months later, in November, during the Russian Defense Minister’s visit to Beijing, the two countries concluded an agreement on ministry-to-ministry defense cooperation. Whether there was any connection between these events was likewise hard to ascertain. But, the new development on the Sino-Russian front made it necessary for the Clinton Administration to conduct a review of the US policy toward China from the geostrategic standpoint. Preempting the usual mid-June annual deadline, President Clinton announced on May 26, 1994 that
Washington would renew China’s MFN (most-favored-nations) status. More important, the MFN would be de-coupled from the perennial human-rights issue (Hsiung, 1994, and 1995).

The second review (Fall 1994) was of a limited nature and was prompted by Congressional displeasure with the State Department’s stance on Taiwan. During the summer of 1994, President Lee Teng-hui of Taiwan stopped over in Hawaii on his way to Central America. By order of the State Department, Lee was restricted in what he could do during the stopover (no news conference; no public speeches, etc.). On his own volition, he remained on board his Presidential aircraft throughout the night after a long journey. When news got out, Congress was incensed at the discourteous treatment Lee had received and, as a result of alleged instigations by the Taiwan lobby, demanded the State Department to make amends. After a brief review of the possible negative feedback from China, the State Department relented and sought to make amends by upgrading Taiwan’s representation in the United States, changing its earlier non-descript name of Coordination Council for North American Affairs (CCNAA) to a new name, Taiwan Economic and Cultural Representative’s Office (TECRO). Shortly after, following a lopsided vote in both houses of Congress in early 1995, the State Department agreed to issue a visa for Lee Teng-hui to visit the United States in May, that year, for a reunion at Cornell University, his alma mater, reversing the Department’s earlier decision not to issue him a visa.

The third and last, but also the longest, review (1995-1996) was brought on by Beijing’s violent reaction to Lee’s 1995 visit to the United States. To Beijing, Lee’s visit was no ordinary affair but a deliberate attempt to foist the Taiwan separatism issue on the American consciousness. In its wake, Beijing started nuclear bluster across the Taiwan Strait, in July 1995 and in the Spring of 1996. A critical review of U.S. China policy was thus thrust upon Washington, once again because of the Taiwan issue. Under pressures from Congress, which passed Resolution 148, the Administration had to demonstrate US resolve, in pursuance of the Taiwan Relations Act, to come to Taiwan’s aid under siege. A flotilla of two aircraft carriers and seventeen other naval vessels briefly steamed across the Taiwan Strait to “show the flag,” at a cost said to be of US$3.8 billion, all of which allegedly was paid by Taiwan. The review continued on till the end of the 1996, through the thick of the Presidential campaign. Because of the complexity of the issues involved and the gravity of the final policy decision made, I shall discuss the review and its outcome in greater detail below.
Origin of Clinton Administration’s All-out Engagement Policy Towards China

The latter part of the third review took place in anticipation of Clinton’s re-election. Anthony Lake, Presidential Advisor for national security, personally took charge of the long process, looking into US strategic interests and a sensible policy toward China. It took place against the backdrop of a geostrategic landscape very different from the time Clinton won the last election in 1992. In the first place, Russia was internally more stabilized and regaining some of its previous strength; and Sino-Russian relations were steadily improving. Following the 1994 agreement, Chinese Premier Li Peng on a visit to Russia in June, 1995, signed with his Russian counterpart five agreements, which, besides settling the remaining border disputes, laid the ground for further cooperation in areas ranging from forest fire fighting, communications, to the machinery industry. President Jiang Zemin also visited Russia, in April 1996, and signed with President Yeltsin twelve documents, in addition to a joint declaration, expanding cooperation to energy, manufacturing, aviation, agriculture, transportation, and other fields. The express intent of the agreements, it was announced, was to build a “strategic 21st century partnership” (Sun 1997, at 88). Behind Moscow’s effort to build such a partnership with China was its fear of the forthcoming expansion of the NATO through East Europe to Russia’s footsteps. For its part, China was still smarting under the humiliation it received from the International Olympic Committee, which rejected Beijing’s bid to host Olympic 2000, allegedly under US pressures. Besides, the Chinese were still piqued at Washington for allowing Lee Teng-hui from Taiwan to visit the United States, which in their eyes implied an implicit US connivance at Lee’s alleged separatist agenda.

In respect of Asia, a number of compelling issues and events demanded US attention, not the least of which was the forthcoming return to Chinese sovereignty, in coming July, of Hong Kong, where the United States has a total of US$13 billion in investments. Japan was sinking deeper into its worst recession that had begun in 1990. The malaise was abetted by a prolonged political chaos since the disintegration in 1993 of the Liberal Democratic Party, which had led Japan’s journey to economic triumph in the 38 years it had been in power. Since the prospect was dim of a resurgent Japan to challenge the United States as it did in the 1980’s as a burgeoning economic superpower, Washington’s apprehensions of a threatening
regional hegemon shifted, therefore, to China, which was on a seemingly unstoppable rise to greater economic heights. President Clinton, in his April 1996 visit to Japan, signed with Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto a US-Japan mutual defense agreement, renewing the bilateral alliance relationship. The attendant question of how to assuage Beijing’s fears that the US-Japanese agreement might be aimed at China remained on the agenda.

Taiwan, in the course of its democratization, was seized in internal dissensions, which were heightened by Taipei’s recent “freezing” (pending expected abolition) of the administrative structure of the Provincial Government (as distinguished from the “Central Government” seated in Taipei). Washington had reasons to be concerned, lest the “freezing” move heralded an outright attempt to steer the island to an unabashedly open separatist course, which would incite Beijing and might invite disaster.

On a number of other Asian issues, Washington found it necessary to enlist Chinese support or, at least, to avoid offending Chinese sensibilities. One example is the worsening situation on the Korean Peninsula, where new tensions mounted in the wake of the massive food shortage in North Korea, prompting the initiation of a four-power meeting in New York involving China and the United States, in addition to the two Koreas. Under a 1994 agreement, the United States had pledged to help defuse the issue of North Korea’s nuclear pretensions through a program called Korean Economic Development Organization (KEDO). North Korea would be provided two light-water reactors, to be built with funding supplied by South Korea, Japan, and the United States, in exchange for Pyongyang’s ditching of its existing nuclear reactors suspected of being used to make nuclear weapons. But the untimely “submarine incident” in the summer of 1996, in which a group of North Korean agents were apprehended while trying to infiltrate into South Korea after disembarking from a submarine, sidetracked the whole effort. Some in Washington were hoping that China, almost the only ally Pyongyang has following the collapse of Soviet power, could help reign in the North Koreans, during a time of deprivation.

In Indochina, US opening to Vietnam, and the instability in Cambodia following the coup that placed Hun Sen in total power, were among the issues concerning which US-Chinese open communications, in an atmosphere of mutual trust, would be helpful.
During the review, Administration advisors suggested that, in addition to China’s rise as an economic power, the United States should heed to China’s own special concerns, in particular with regard to the question of sovereignty and territorial integrity. This was the crucial issue underpinning not only the return of Hong Kong and Macao, but also the future of Taiwan and the internal stability of Tibet.

The end result of the review was an all-out engagement policy toward China, designed to reverse the deteriorating course of Sino-US relations and, more important, to seek over the long run China’s integration into the main stream of international politics and the global economic system. While the full range of the all-out engagement policy was not made public until after President Clinton’s inauguration for his second term in January 1997, its outline was known by the fall of 1996. Its goals were: (a) to ensure that China not be a threat to its neighbors, (b) to encourage China to accept the nuclear nonproliferation (NPT) regimes; (c) to induce the Chinese to embrace the principle of uninhibited free trade; and (d) to see China live in an atmosphere of peace, prosperity, and freedom (CQ 1996, at 2820f).

In sum, the White House decided to pursue comprehensive engagement toward China in a way that would be “purposeful, coherent, and consistent.” The newly appointed Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright called it “multi-faceted” (New York Times, January 25, 1997, p. 4).

In background White House briefings, described as “not for attribution” and held after the 1996 Presidential election for members of the Congress, the new policy toward China was defined as consisting of the following ten principles of engagement:

1. No unilateral use of offensive military force;
2. Peaceful resolution of territorial disputes;
3. Respect for national sovereignty;
4. Freedom of navigation;
5. Moderation in military forces;
6. Transparency of military forces;
(7) Nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction;
(8) Market access for trade and investment;
(9) Cooperative solutions for transnational problems;
(10) Respect for basic human rights.

It was acknowledged, during the briefings, that these principles were first drafted by the Asia Policy Panel, of the Council on Foreign Relations (New York), in 1996. The main objectives sought in the policy package were described as seeking to preserve American vital interests in Asia, while accommodating to China’s emergence as a major power.

Analysis

The strategy of engagement, in fact, will follow two parallel lines, economic and security. Economic engagement will promote the integration of China into the global trading and financial systems. Its tactics is to promote China’s economic integration through negotiations on trade liberalization, institution building, and educational exchange.

Security engagement, on the other hand, is to encourage compliance with the ten principles above by diplomatic and military means, when economic incentives do not suffice, in order to hedge against the risk of the emergence of a belligerent China. The induction of China into the ASEAN Regional Forum and into the US-Japan mutual defense dialogue, therefore, would be in keeping with the intent of the security engagement design. The tactics of security engagement is aimed at reducing the risks posed by China’s rapid military expansion, what Washington considers as the Chinese lack of transparency, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and transnational problems such as crime and illegal migration, by engaging in arms control negotiations, multilateral efforts, and a loosely-structured defensive military arrangement in Asia.

To dramatize that the policy bears the stamp of President Clinton’s full approval, the White House briefings noted in particular that President Clinton, more than any other American President, was guided by a realization that US policy toward China must be based on a balanced understanding of mutual national interests. The United States must recognize China’s legitimate interests and not to make U.S. interests the sole criteria for defining the
rules of acceptable behavior for China. In Clinton’s second term, it was further suggested, the United States was prepared to ensure China’s full participation in regional and world affairs; and the United States would not exclude China from any bilateral or multilateral arrangements that may affect China’s national interests.

If these claims are true - and I have no doubt they are - then the new comprehensive China policy of the United States seems to reflect an awareness of the challenge posed by the new world order and the more recent pressing developments requiring an appropriate U.S. response, as presented above.

**Strategic Desiderata and the New China Policy**

If a look at history and its appropriate lessons was worth the effort, it was not hard for Washington to discover a decisive shift in China’s strategic thinking. During the Qing Dynasty (1664-1911), China concentrated its forces against the Russians and Mongolians in the northwest. That preoccupation, or distraction, cost the Chinese dearly, as they neglected their navy and their defenses along their long sea coasts. Within thirty years after it began to modernize under the Meiji Reforms, Japan had taken Taiwan and annexed Korea, a Chinese protectorate then, after a brief war in which it defeated China in 1895. China did not realize, until quite late, its mistake that the threat posed by the maritime powers coming from the seas and from China’s east and southeast had to be dealt with as a first priority.

The full-scale Chinese modernization of the navy and the air force, which began as from the late 1980’s, seems to suggest that the Chinese have finally realized the long-standing mistake since the Qing times. They seem to have discovered how they should cope with the challenge of modern times.

To China in the 1990’s, the challenge comes from the uncertain future directions of Taiwan, the latent conflict with Japan over Diaoyutai/Senkaku islets, and the blatant conflict over the outlying islands of Paracels and Spratlys. Both China and Vietnam claim the former and have fought two recent wars over it (1973 and 1988), and both have laid claims to the latter along with four other parties, including Taiwan and the Philippines. Chinese and Filipino
naval units fought a hot war over a tiny islet called, quite graphically, Mischief, in the Spratly group in 1995.

For its part, the American presence in Asia Pacific appears to ring in China from its periphery, as the United States is closely connected to South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia. Washington, by necessity, has to make Beijing understand that the US role is not threatening to China and that, sooner or later, the two nations should be able to work out a power-sharing arrangement, while at the same time China will be made to understand that the United States is committed to its principles. Those include US support for democracy, and intolerance of the overthrow of a friendly democratic country by external use of force. In return, Washington recognizes that the Chinese will not tolerate infringement on their sovereignty and their aspirations for national unity (Lilly 1997). And, this should also be made known to the Chinese.

The fact that China in the 1990’s is a potential superpower was also a factor that the United States could overlook only at its own peril. Chinese foreign policy in recent years seemed to have taken on a fairly anti-American coloration in response to a rising tide of anti-American nationalism that swept China in 1996, raising legitimate concerns in Washington. The Chinese military buildup in naval and air force units and their successful development of weapons of mass destruction, although not necessarily directed against the United States, could not but make Washington edgy. While its impulse was to try to beef up US relations with Japan, Indonesia, and other ASEAN nations, Washington was also apprehensive that these moves might unnecessarily alarm the Chinese and further jeopardize US-Chinese relations (Rodman, 1997, at 10f).

In a section below, I shall discuss the US concern with the fate of the so-called San Francisco system of defense, built on a network of bilateral mutual security treaties with Asian Pacific states including Japan and some members of today’s ASEAN, and designed originally to combat the Soviet threat. While the system’s continuing value has come in doubt in the post-Cold War era, Washington had to device an alternative mechanism that would both ensure regional security and provide a justification for America’s continuing military role in Asia Pacific. Any such mechanism, it is obvious, could either target China as the imagined
threat, as the Soviet Union once had been, or, alternatively, treat China as a partner in regional collective security.

The policy of comprehensive engagement toward China that emerged from this review, in the end, opted for the second approach, which was considered more sensible from the standpoint of the larger US strategic concerns. The rationale of the engagement policy was that once accepted into the international main stream, in both security and economic domains, China would cease to feel alienated, so that it would not have to fight the system from outside the system. Instead, it was reasoned, China would feel secure enough to behave according to the standards of behavior accepted by all nations, in contrast to the remaining pariah states like Iraq and Libya. Hence, the engagement must be comprehensive and, in Secretary of State Albright’s words, “multi-faceted,” as already noted.

The Underlining Premises of the New US China Policy

For a fuller appreciation of the true import and implications of this new US China policy, including the question whether the policy will survive Clinton, we have to address (i) the premises of the new China policy, and (ii) how the China policy dovetails with the overall US foreign and security policy goals. Let’s look at the premises first.

Five underpinning cardinal premises can be deduced from the new US policy of comprehensive engagement toward China.

(a) that both China and the United States share a common desire to avert an armed conflict either between themselves or involving either of them, which can easily escalate into a nuclear war that neither one would want;
(b) that both nations have a common interest in gradually reducing and eventually eliminating the existing nuclear stockpiles known to exist in the world;
(c) that both share a commitment to end all nuclear tests, as attested to by their respective acceptance of the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty concluded in the fall of 1996, to which over 150 members of the United Nations became parties. They include states known to have the capacity of building nuclear weapons, with the sole exception of India;
(d) that both China and the United States have a common interest in preventing and bringing to an end the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and

(e) that both countries have stakes in preserving peace and stability in Asia Pacific and in the world at large. For example, neither would wish to see Japan go nuclear; both China and the United States also share a common desire to work for the stability of the Korean peninsula and Indochina.

This is not to deny that Chinese and U.S. interests may diverge on certain other issues, such as over China’s alleged sales of M-11 guided-missile technology to Pakistan, and of nuclear-power technology to Iran. Although in the latter case, the transaction was legal, as it was subject to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitoring, the United States was worried that Iran might stealthily convert nuclear-power technology thus acquired to the production of nuclear weapons. Notwithstanding these divergent interests, the five premises regarding a Sino-US convergence of interests are considered important enough to outweigh any divergencies.

The same can be said of the outstanding Sino-US disputes over human rights, protection of intellectual properties, the MFN issue, China’s bid to enter the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Taiwan question. These by comparison, however, are eclipsed by larger US concerns, for instance, over the fact that Europe and Japan have overtaken the United States as China’s close trading partners. Besides, there are hidden costs for not keeping an eye closed to certain disagreements with China. Take the Taiwan question, for example. During its last China policy review, the Clinton Administration came to the horrifying realization that in its show of force in the Taiwan Strait during the 1995-1996 crisis, the United States had come close to an accidental hot war with China over Taiwan. The lesson to be learned from that near-disaster was that the United States should forever be on guard against getting head-on into a situation that might inadvertently trigger a US-China armed conflict. Hence, the US disagreements with China over Taiwan should not be a stumbling block to improved Sino-US ties. The Administration finally embraced suggestions that in order for Taiwan to have peace, not only should the island maintain peaceful relations with mainland China, but, equally important, it is imperative that the United States must have good, peaceful, and productive relations with both China and Taiwan.
The New China Policy in Relation to US Overall Foreign & Security Policy

In the post-Cold War era, the global foreign policy and defense posture of the United States can be summarized in three tenets:

(i) It is a historic mission thrust upon the United States, as the only remaining superpower, to endeavor toward safeguarding global and regional peace and stability in the post-Cold War era;

(ii) The United States should redouble its efforts in promoting global free trade, as is consistent with the dictates of the geoeconomic age; and

(iii) Washington should follow a cost-effective strategy, to prevent wasteful diversions of US physical and human resources. Consistent with this goal, the following ceilings should be set as a matter of national policy: The annual national defense budget should be kept at no higher than US$265 billion; the total US armed forces on active duty should be kept to no more than 1.4 million soldiers; and US troops deployed overseas, both in Europe and Asia, should be kept under 100,000 in aggregate (cf. CQ 1996, at 2812, and 2820).

These are bipartisan goals, as they have the firm support of both Congress and the White House. To the extent that the new US China policy, aimed at building a Sino-US strategic partnership into the twenty-first century, is consistent with these overall goals, then it is part and parcel of America's post-Cold War global strategic master-plan. As its five underlying premises clearly indicate, there is no doubt that the new US China policy is consistent with America's global strategic goals. As such, the new China policy commands bipartisan support. It was no coincidence that during the 1996 Presidential campaign, the Republican candidate, Bob Dole, shared the same China policy orientation as his Democratic rival Bill Clinton, the incumbent in the White House. In this light, the new China policy can be expected to have a life of its own even after Clinton leaves the White House.

Sino-US Relations Moving Toward Reciprocal Bilateralism
The announcement in early 1997 of new US-China policy has ushered in a flurry of activities beginning with high-level exchanges between the two countries, including visits by military top brass and defense officials as well as members of Congress. A summit exchange that began with Chinese President Jiang Zemin’s state visit to the United States in October 1997, will be completed with the visit to China by President Clinton, now scheduled for late June, 1998. In the meantime, bureaucratic engagement between the two governments began to expand, in ways that will assist the unfolding re-normalization of US-China relations. As an indication of an expectant euphoria, Wei Jingsheng, regarded as China’s most prominent dissident, was released from penal custody and went to the United States for “medical care” in 1997. The US proposal to build a Sino-US strategic partnership was explicitly reciprocated by the Chinese. President Jinag Zemin, in his capacity as the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, announced to the Party’s 15th Congress held in September 1997 that China was looking forward to such a Sino-US partnership. In short, the new initiative has not only lifted Sino-US relations out of the doldrums since 1989, but has moved beyond the stage of what Robert Kapp (1998, p.7) calls “reciprocal unilateralism.” To put it mildly, I would call the present stage one of reciprocal bilateralism.


A few things in regard to the Sino-US summit are worth mentioning. The first noteworthy item is that by-and-large the nations in the Asian Pacific region reacted favorably to the news of the summitry. No Asian nation was known to be opposed (Shambaugh, 1997, p. 13). The Jiang visit to the United States in the first phase of the summit exchange, which took place in October 1997, coincided with the onset of the financial crisis hitting the region. A consensus seemed to have swelled up in many area states, even in some that were not the hardest hit by the financial turbulence and hence needed no immediate bailout, in that they seemed to share an urge for a U.S. comeback to the region. Even the Philippines, which had in 1992 unceremoniously evicted US naval forces from the Subic Bay base, is reportedly ready to negotiate for the return of a US naval presence (Ming Bao, 1/15/98, p. 20). The Sino-US summit, which was destined to improve the bilateral relations between the two major powers of importance to Asia, apparently was viewed to be paving the way for a smooth comeback of US influence in the region (Shambaugh, 1997, 13f).
Another reason for the favorable response of Asian nations to the Sino-US summit may be the changed state of China’s relations with its Asian neighbors. Unlike during the pre-1990 period, China has good, even cordial, relations with all nations in Asia Pacific, and manages to maintain an off-and-on dialogue with Taiwan. Critics may point out that Japan, which was known to have proffered to purchase combat aircraft (including MIG-29’s) from Russia, may both pose a threat to China and have reasons to fear a turn toward the better in Sino-US relations. If so, at least Japan did not make its opposition known.

The second noteworthy development was the extent to which both the American and the Chinese sides had tried to be conciliatory, so as to ensure the success of the summit exchange. President Clinton in 1997 was reportedly determined not to let strategic priorities be sidetracked by issues such as human rights (SCMP 10/25/97, p. 9). While in the United States, President Jiang, on his part, tried to project an image of being supportive of human rights. He confirmed that China would accede to the 1966 United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (SCMP, 10/26/97, p.1). Although the original date the media speculated on was sometime in coming April, it was announced in Beijing on March 13, 1998, that China had in fact signed the ICESCR convention back in October, 1997. Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, in the surprise announcement, offered still another surprise, that China intended to sign the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), a multilateral convention likewise concluded in 1966 and in force since 1976 (SCMP, 3/13/98, p. 1).

The ICCPR and its sister convention, the ICESCR, are important in that they, in conjunction with the U. N. Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Genocide Convention (1948), are often regarded as the “international bill of rights” (Hsiung 1997, 110). The ICCPR, more especially, is an instrument designed to protect the rights of citizens, including the right of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, religion, and movement.

While Western media speculated that in making the announcement, the Chinese may have in mind the impending meeting of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva, where the United States, in an almost annual ritual, may sponsor a resolution critical of China’s human-rights record (cf. International Herald Tribune, 3/13/98, p. 1). But, it seems to me, that
China's need to steal the thunder from the coming Geneva meeting was not so pressing this year. Already, the European Union had agreed to drop its support for a resolution critical of China. The U.S. measure reportedly had little chance of adoption (IHT, 3/13/98, 1). The timing of the Chinese announcement, therefore, was most likely to clear the air for President Clinton's visit to China, which had at one point been given as in November but was advanced to late June (SCMP, 1/13/98, p.1).

Early in 1998, President Clinton certified to Congress that China had met nuclear non-proliferation requirements. The move would smooth the way for U.S. industry to seek orders to supply China's mammoth nuclear power programme; China immediately welcomed the move (SCMP, 1/17/98, p. 8). CIA Director, George Tenet, in a report to Congress, went on record as saying that while China was bent on military updating of its antiquated equipment, it was too premature to say for sure that China would be an aggressive power as a result (SCMP, 1/3/98, p. 5).

Earlier, we noted a security engagement component to Clinton's comprehensive engagement policy toward China. A first step in that direction seemed to be the signing of the Military Maritime Consultation Agreement, on January 20, 1998, during Secretary of Defense William Cohen's visit in Beijing. The agreement provides for annual meetings of senior military officials of both countries, to work out maritime procedures. "The agreement," said the U.S. defense secretary, "demonstrates the maturing relationship between our militaries." Newspaper reports even noted that Secretary Cohen was given an unprecedented tour of a secret Chinese air-defense centre, signalling a new openness and warmth after decades of mutual distrust (SCMP, 1/20/98, p. 5).

As suggested above, during the US policy reviews, it was noted that China's naval and air-force modernization since the 1980's seemed to suggest a determination to rectify a historical mistake of neglecting threats to Chinese national security along the coasts. During the last round of the China policy reviews, as noted above, US security managers came to the shocking realization that the United States almost had inadvertently got into a hot war with China during the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait crisis. In this light, the U.S.-China military maritime consultation agreement of 1998 seems to be a calculated measure to avert the possibility of an accidental war with the Chinese navy, most probably in the Taiwan Strait.
U.S., Taiwan, and Mainland China

This discussion would not be complete without touching on the Taiwan factor in the US China policy equation. While this is a separate topic by itself, I wish only to touch on two points relevant to our interest in this discussion. One is related to Washington’s policy toward Taiwan after the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait crisis. The other is what the new US China policy entails for Taiwan. I shall take up the first point first.

<> Has the U.S. policy toward Taiwan changed? Many in Taiwan, in particular those supporting the island’s separatist course, would like us to believe that the US show of force when Taiwan was under siege, during mainland Chinese nuclear bluster, was evidence that the United States would defend Taiwan against an invasion in the event the island openly breaks away from its historical China connection and declares its separatist independence. If their interpretation is true, it would point to a fundamental change in U.S. policy on Taiwan. If so, it would be near impossible to reconcile with Clinton’s new China policy. Hence, a comment is called for.

Let me note that the Taiwan Strait crisis, precipitated by Beijing’s missile testing in protest to President Lee Teng-hui’s “alummal diplomacy (his visit to Cornell University in 1995), did not begin in March 1996, but in the summer of 1995. Throughout the summer, the United States remained quiet, while Beijing fired guided missiles with real nuclear warheads, pounding on waters only a few kilometers off Taiwan in July and again in August. An apparently disappointed Lee Teng-hui, on August 13, lamented that to expect the United States to act to bail out Taiwan under the circumstances would be “impossible” (United Daily [Taipei], 8/14/95, p. 1). The fact the United States chose, instead, to act in the spring of 1996, after having sat out the previous summer, is therefore a puzzle whose answer holds the key to the whether US policy toward Taiwan had indeed changed.

---

2 In this section, I am relying on my own article "The Deepening of the Taiwan-Mainland Paradox and US Policy Toward Asia Pacific Security," in Hai-hsin ping-lun [Straits Review Monthly] (Taipei), No. 66 (June 1, 1996), pp. 12-16.
The answer, I would argue, turns on what transpired in the interim -- that is, between summer 1995 and spring 1996 -- that touched on a sensitive issue, namely the fate of what remains of the so-called San Francisco system of defense. The San Francisco system is so called because it was here the United States in 1951 laid down the groundwork for an elaborate alliance network, when it initiated a number of mutual security treaties with Asia Pacific countries: Japan, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand (ANZUS). Subsequently, the alliance system extended to South Korea (1953), Taiwan (1954, but abrogated after the 1979 normalization of US-PRC relations), and Thailand (1962). The San Francisco system has served the U.S. interest well, but after the disappearance of the Soviet threat its rationale came in doubt (Stuart and Tow 1995). In what remains of the system, however, the US-Japan nexus is a crucial, even final, prop. Hence, Washington was greatly concerned with the lease of the US military base in Okinawa, due to expire in 1996.

It so happened that in October 1995, three American servicemen criminally assaulted a 12-year old school girl in Okinawa, setting off a string of prolonged protests by the natives, who besieged their governor, urging him to torpedo the lease renewal. Although the three American GI’s were tried and convicted in early March 1996, the continuing protests had sent ripples to Japan proper. For a time, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto looked ambivalent about the Okinawa base renewal bid.

But, help came from un-expected quarters. In the Taiwan Strait, the second round of the Chinese nuclear testing was going full blast, creating a furor in Washington as well as tensions throughout the Asia Pacific region. The occasion provided a timely opportunity, and legitimate pretext, for Washington to act, to drive home the message to Asians (in particular the Japanese) that, despite the disappearance of the Soviet threat, US military presence was still a necessity for life in the post-Cold War era. The Japanese got the message. In April, 1996, when President Clinton visited Tokyo, Prime Minister Hashimoto signed a joint agreement extending the US-Japan understanding on mutual security, besides renewing the lease for US military base in Okinawa. This explains why the United States, after sitting out through the 1995 phase of the Taiwan Strait crisis, suddenly decided to send in a flotilla that it did to the Strait in early 1996, when Taiwan was literally “under the gun.”
What about the Congressional Resolution (H Cong 148), which provided the backbone for the US carriers and 17 other ships dispatched in 1996? The resolution was tantalizingly labeled as in support of the “Defense of Taiwan.” Did it update the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979?

Resolution H Cong 148 contained four points: (a) It expression a US displeasure with Beijing’s nuclear diplomacy; (b) it urged Beijing to end its missile testing, and to negotiate its differences with Taiwan; (c) it requested the President to consult Congress on matters relating to Taiwan’s defense needs, in the interest of ensuring that the island would be able to defend itself; and (d) it expressed an earnest hope that mainland China and Taiwan would maintain a peaceful relationship. It is noteworthy that prior to a vote on the floors of Congress, the House Committed on International Relations, on March 13, had inserted into the original text of the Resolution, in connection with point (d), a new clause that the United States did not support Taiwan’s [separatist’ independence.

It is clear that the first three points above addressed the exigency of the Chinese nuclear missile testing then going on. Only the final point contains anything of substance that is indicative of US Taiwan policy. Whether or not the Resolution represents an advance over the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) will, therefore, become obvious from a comparison with that earlier document.

In its Section 1, the TRA provides for Taiwan’s security by pledging to supply to the island’s defense needs, when necessary. More important, it enunciates the US policy that the future of Taiwan should be settled by peaceful means. Any attempt to alter the status of Taiwan by any means other than peaceful, it states, will be of grave concern to the United States, hence unacceptable. This is usually taken to mean that an armed invasion from the mainland would be unacceptable. But, in addition, there is a hidden meaning in the “peaceful means only” stricture: In the event Taiwan should declare itself a separatist independent state, thus bringing on itself a sure armed attack from the mainland, it would also be unacceptable, because from the standpoint of the TRA, it would also be an attempt to alter Taiwan’s status (albeit at the island’s own initiative) by other than peaceful means.
The new Congressional Resolution (H Cong 148), in its substantive part, simply spells out in explicit terms what was left vague in the TRA in what Henry Kissinger would call “purposive ambiguity.” Thus viewed, the new document does not represent a change from the basic purport of US policy as laid down in the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979.

What does the new US China policy have in store for Taiwan? To make a long story short, US strategic outlook, as discussed above, sees China’s cooperativeness (partnership?) as indispensable for US security interests in Asia Pacific. Moreover, it also sees a sustained peaceful dialogue between Taiwan and mainland China as holding the key to peace and stability in the region. This is why the new Congressional Resolution (H Cong 148) laid emphasis on direct negotiations between Taiwan and the mainland, on the heels of a cessation of Beijing’s nuclear intimidation. In adopting the Resolution, Congress apparently did not anticipate that the hindrance to direct talks would come from Taiwan’s chie-chi yung-ren (no haste, exercise self-control) policy, soon after Beijing’s nuclear testing ceased.

In view of the sentiments in Congress, and of the new US China policy, it seems that pressures will mount for Taiwan to negotiate its differences with Beijing, with a view to finding a long-term settlement. Not surprisingly, during their recent separate visits to Taipei, both Secretary of Defense William Cohen (following his visit to Beijing) and former White House Advisor on National Security, Anthony Lake, each in his own way, suggested that Taipei should break the current deadlock. Lake even went further to urge a “sustained, institutionalized dialogue between Taiwan and the mainland (Central Daily [Taipei], March, 5, 1998, p. 1). President Jiang Zemin, looking forward to Bill Clinton’s mid-year visit to China, is reported (SCMP, 3/15/98, p. 1) to have expressed a hope that the visit by the American President will generate enough pressures on Taiwan to move it out of dead center under its no-talks policy associated with President Lee Teng-hui.

One possible outcome from the Jiang-Clinton summit in June 1998 could be an inchoate understanding to the effect that, in the event the “one country, two systems” model proves to be working in post-reversion Hong Kong, the United States would consider it an arguably acceptable formula for the future peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question. And, Washington, under the circumstances, would encourage Taiwan to nail it down through direct
negotiations with Beijing, under of course US watchful eyes. A leverage in Washington's hands is that if Taiwan should continue to hold out against a negotiated settlement, using the Hong Kong model as a guide, the United States would then be freed from its obligations to supply to Taiwan's defense needs under the TRA. The rationale, or justification for the US washing its hands off Taiwan, is that in the circumstances, it is Taiwan that would have shown an obduracy in rejecting a possibly workable, negotiated "peaceful solution" to its disagreements with mainland China. This much could go into a Jiang-Clinton understanding as part of a substantive outcome of the mid-1998 China summit. The outside world, of course, would know only if both sides want to make the understanding public.

Concluding Remarks

We have examined the challenge posed by the post-Cold war world order to US global policy, as it affects US interests in Asia Pacific, and, moreover, how it has helped to shape a new US China Policy that looks beyond Tiananmen and into the twenty-first century.

While the origin of the new US policy of engagement, as discussed, was a complicated and convoluted one, the most important lesson we learn from the above analysis is that to Washington, the China question is never considered in isolation of America's larger interests. In this sense, the new China policy is linked to Washington's perceived self-interests in the post Cold-War order, especially as it pertains to the Asia Pacific region.

Nevertheless, the two most important events that have precipitated, even accelerated, the advent of Washington's new China policy were, without doubt, the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1995-1996 and the Chinese move toward a strategic partnership with Russia, a process that began in 1994 but was brought to the surface by the Jiang-Yeltsin Declaration of April 25, 1996.

The implications of the new US China policy for Taiwan are easier to pinpoint, since the policy, especially its security engagement component, was designed to make China a stabilizing force in Asia, essentially by drawing it into the main stream of international politics. Stability and tranquillity in the Taiwan Strait would be almost a prerequisite for peace and stability in the larger region. That condition would in turn depend on, and require, a prior
sustained dialogue between the two sides straddling the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan, which for the moment seems oblivious to this logic, will probably catch on fast in the foreseeable future, lest its security interest be in peril.

By contrast, however, the implications for Russia and the future of the Russo-Chinese partnership are not so clear. Wittingly or not, the emergence of a Sino-US partnership, on the heels of a Sino-Russian partnership already in the brewing, will bring into existence two parallel bilateral strategic partnerships. Inevitably, the two partnerships will constitute a de facto triad recalling the strategic US-Sino-Soviet triangle during the 1980’s. The door seems open for the United States and Russia to form a bilateral partnership of their own. Until then, China will be in a pivotal position, as it is the only bridge between the two separate, possibly competing, bilateral strategic partnerships.
REFERENCES


