

# **China and the U.S. Contend & Cooperate: A Different Slant on U.S.-China Security Issues**

Eric A. McVadon, Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired)

## **US-China Policy Foundation's eleventh annual Policymakers Seminar Series**

U.S. Capitol, Friday 20 June 2008, 12:00- 1:30 p.m.

**NEA security framework.** I want to address Sino-U.S. security issues from an unexpected angle: arguably the bigger picture is that a new security environment has evolved and possibly we are moving to a new security architecture for NEA.

- A question that could turn out to be on a par with NK nukes or even Taiwan is what role the U.S. ends up playing in both the evolution of the security environment and form if it becomes a structure. Will we play an active role and ensure that American interests are fully taken into account? Or will we find that we have either largely opted out or been shouldered out of the way? US and the EAS, ARF, SCO?
- Explain the concept: what we have now (alliances; communiqués; statements, both clear and ambiguous; strategies of engaging, hedging, avoiding provocation, denying access, assuring access, using soft power, favoring non-military means) understandings and misunderstandings), and that we now, as the environment has evolved, have all that hodgepodge (conglomeration) but with a new feature: the US and China have moved from name calling and almost adversarial relations to what is arguably a budding strategic partnership or at least potentially that. No more name-calling; a new military hot line; good personal relations between our presidents and the foreign minister and SecState; exchange of visits by senior officials and military officers; the effort to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue.

**North Korea and Six-Party Talks (6PT).** China's role in the NK issue has fostered good bilateral relations, altered the security environment—including rather than excluding China—and enhanced prospects of an inclusive security framework, although it is premature to attempt that now.

- 6PT remain difficult, with the outcome uncertain. Pyongyang blames us. We blame Py. Others blame both. Some of us blame China. Some Chinese and South Koreans have been pointed in their criticism of Washington as being inflexible and letting a desire by some NK-haters for the collapse of the DPRK deflect us from flexibility, real negotiating, and real innovation in our approach to an admittedly reprehensible regime. Now, with the advent of US flexibility under Ass't Sec'y Chris Hill, worries are expressed that the US is imprudently caving in so as to get an agreement.
- As I've suggested, I think the issue is wider than just NK nukes. Even if the 6P talks fail, this has been a springboard to new regional security arrangements and has brought about an enormously favorable, if still far from perfect, US-China relationship: a new paradigm for contending and cooperating—something I certainly wouldn't have forecast in my early pol-mil days.
- China is not only the host but also the broker; reluctant to impose sanctions. Explain fear of collapse, chaos, loss of leverage by breaking the lever (my analogy).
- US the most concerned about proliferation (Japan worried about missiles and was peeved about abductions)
- US & China, now much closer wrt nuclear-free KP, got religion after Indian and Pakistani tests in May 1998—over ten years ago!
- But China gives priority to stability and economic ties and growth
- Some in US concerned about ROK-China warm ties, especially in light of tensions in US-ROK alliance; need not be zero-sum. NK as buffer state not so important any longer; buffer against what?
- China lost patience and expressed anger over NK missile and nuclear tests in July and October 2007. US feels the 19 September 2005 statement gives Py a roadmap for NK to join the world and set things right. Optimistic!
- Beijing retains its treaty with Pyongyang—the only such alliance China has, but it is far from clear that military forces would be sent to aid the KPA. However, well-connected Chinese think-tankers now talk of planning to move large numbers of PLA forces well into NK if there is collapse, unrest, or chaos with uncertainty about the security of NK nukes and fissile material—danger of its falling into the hands of terrorists.

I won't forecast outcome of 6PT or NEA security architecture, but I hope a result will be a further move by Washington and Beijing away from adversarial relations and toward partnership. Might we imagine PLAN and USN as partners on the high seas, around the globe, and in space? I can, but my optimistic vision is clouded by the other huge and intransigent problem for the region: Taiwan.

**Taiwan.** So, I turn to this issue that is always looming in the background as we think about US-China relations or jumping to the foreground as we talk to the Chinese, regardless of whether we think Taiwan is the topic. Explain China's obsession. China's military intimidation and political maneuvering has both kept Taiwan from moving toward independence and exacerbated polarization of Taiwan's people. PLA modernization over the last decade is, in my opinion, intended to defeat Taiwan quickly and thwart timely, effective US intervention.

- Describe the "new PLA," and its astute choice of ballistic and cruise missiles (Second Artillery)—weapons that are very hard to counter and that minimize direct risk to the PLA ground, naval, and air forces: new DF-31A ICBMs to complement older DF-5As; SRBMs & MRBMs, LACMs
- Submarines with ASCMs (submerged-launch) from Ru & indigenous development and production
- We sell arms to Tw (and Beijing complains mightily, of course), but Tw buying little—costly, ineffective. Patriot, subs with IOC ten or more years out—imagine PLAN submarine force by that time! An alternative (foolish?) was offensive counter-strike, but this program has almost certainly been halted with the inauguration of new Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou.
- Explain further the BMD dilemma to Taiwan, USN, US forces in the region. Only to degrade defenses and permit effective air follow-up as well as complementary 5<sup>th</sup> Column, SOF, IO, anti-space, amphib, airborne, naval, etc.
- But could China and PLA pull off dual campaigns—daunting for us?!
- Tensions actually eased even with the unruly President Chen Shui-bian in office. Bj constrained despite Anti-Secession Law of March 2005. Some may recognize counterproductive effect (alienation of people of Taiwan, whose hearts and minds they want to win) of more missiles, more threats and intimidation.
- Nevertheless, Bj hardly contemplating renunciation of use of force.

**Shaping and China.** Our QDR from a few years back discusses shaping Bj's decisions. Here's a different slant on that:

- I assert that we need first for both sides to be transparent, candid. Bj is already more transparent than suggested by our complaints, but it should cease disingenuous explanation of PLA modernization; US make clear its vastly superior military status. Perils of escalation. My sound bite is "engage seriously, hedge seriously,
- The term *shaping* has an arrogant ring.
  - o Chinese first said they didn't want to shape US, but they do on NK, alliances, especially on U.S.-Japan relations (even if married to Japan, give us a hug) and normal country movement, BMD, Taiwan arms sales and intervention, and maritime resource disputes in ECS), interventions, interference in internal affairs
  - o Shaping best seen as reciprocal. For example: US wrt NEA security concept inclusive of a more responsible China; PRC wrt honey instead of vinegar in its Tw policy.
  - o Shaping won't reverse modernization of PLA any more than it would work on getting US to abandon the concept of a military suitable or needed for the world's only superpower. Shaping won't make China a democracy in the American model.
- China and the US will continue to contend on many issues, not just military and security issues. However, there is the remarkable opportunity to promote new levels of cooperation. China, we may conclude, may not be lying when it asserts that it is not aggressive, expansionist, seeking to expel U.S. from the region, and unappreciative of beneficial aspects of U.S. military presence in the region—over the last half century and now. As I alluded to, it is conceivable that the U.S. and China become partners on the high seas, in space, in science and technology, and, of course, continue to be partners in culture, trade, and other economic endeavors. Who is to say what cooperation of this sort between the world's richest and most powerful nation and the world's most populous nation (for the time being) might produce in 10 years, 20 years, 50 years, or (in the Chinese perspective), a century from now?