

Building Cooperative Relations & Maintaining Nuclear Stability between China and the US

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1. Three Classes of Issues Influencing Future China-US Relations

The nature of future China-US relations, cooperative or rival, will be determined by their interests and policies in the following three fields.

(1) **World issues:** More specifically, they refer to two types of issues. One is global issues, including global political and economical arrangements, and transnational issues. The other is regional issues (excluding East Asia), such as Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia. The United States, a dominant country in the world, and China, a major developing country as well as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, both have their interests and responsibilities in such issues.

(2) **Regional issues in East Asia.** China is a country in this region by geographical definition. As for the United States, its forward-deployment of troops into this region and military alliances with Japan and South Korea make it part of East Asia at least politically. Understandably, both countries have substantial interests in such regional issues of East Asia as a nuclear-weapon-free Korea Peninsula and a peaceful Japan

(3) **Bilateral issues:** Included here are mutual interests, perceptions and policies between China and the United States (especially US interests, perceptions and policies in/of /on China). Issues relating to Taiwan, trade, military modernization and arms control can also be classified into this category.

Though the above three factors are all important in influencing future China-US relations, regional and bilateral issues, generally speaking, are more crucial than world issues. This is mainly due to the limitations of China's interests and capabilities.

2. Primed for Cooperation or Ripe for Rivalry? Prospects for the Future China-US Relations ²

Based on both structural and behavioral considerations, we have reasons to be optimistic while looking into the future of China-US relations. Cooperation should and can be the

mainstream. Among various reasons, strategic basis and management mechanism deserve to be emphasized.

(1) Strategic basis

In comparison to management mechanism, strategic basis has always been the primary factor in deciding the quality of Sino-US relations. However, the components of this basis are fluid. During the Cold war, it consisted mainly of a unilateral factor (conflict of ideology and social system in 1950s and 1960s; common threats from the Soviet Union in 1970s and 1980s); now it consists of multiple factors and thus becomes a comprehensive basis. Despite their important differences, China and the United States hold many common grounds as well as complimentary interests. These interests can serve as a more firm and durable basis for the future China-US relations. When Jiang Zemin met George W. Bush in the latter's private Crawford ranch last October, therefore, both sides suggested to increase exchanges and cooperation in fields including trade, cultural, educational, security and issues including the fight against global terrorism, non-proliferation, Iraq, North Korea.

(2) Management mechanism

It is natural for China and the United States to have some disagreements from time to time because of their quite different national situations and political cultures. The key issue is how to manage them. In the past thirty years since 1971 (the transition point when the US and China began to normalize their relations), the management mechanism has been established gradually after experiencing successes and setbacks, especially during crisis periods like what happened after US bombing of Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 and airplane collision in 2001. Also, according to what have been said by the two Presidents in their meeting last October, they agree to: (a) resolve the differences through mutual understanding and respect; (b) continue to hold Summit or other high-rank meetings; (c) set up dialogue and coordination on major international and regional issues. This management mechanism was proved to be effective in the recent Iraq war.

3. Maintaining Stability of Nuclear Relationship between China and the United States

Despite the above positive aspects, there are still some important issues for them to work out in order to continue building and promoting future cooperation. Taiwan issue is top on the list. In addition, it is also very important to maintain stability of nuclear relationship between China and the United States.

(1) The basic nature of China-US nuclear relationship is deterrence

Though some people in the United States threatened to use nuclear weapons against China before mid-1960s, a kind of stable nuclear relationship among them has been established

since then for several reasons: First, both of them regarded the Soviet Union as the major strategic threat. Second, China declared the No-First-Use policy in 1964 and has factually followed a doctrine of minimal nuclear deterrence. It showed neither capability nor intention to participate in any nuclear arms race. As Mao Zedong stated in 1961, "Nuclear weapons are something for frightening others and will not be used ... such a weapon will not be used, and the more they are produced, the more nuclear wars can not be initiated."³ Third, The ABM treaty was signed between the United States and the Soviet Union, which had indirect positive influence on China-US relations.

(2) Challenge to the stability of China-US nuclear relationship

However, such stability of nuclear relationship has been challenged since the end of the Cold War.

First, after the Tiananmen incident of 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the subsequent two years, the mutual trust between China and the United States has been weakened.

Second, the United States has promoted its plans of developing and deploying TMD and NMD, especially under the Bush administration. Since 9.11 tragedy, because of the American wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, this plan seems to have retreated to the background, but it is still there and will be prominent again once the US position is improved. This caused serious concerns of China for two reasons: On the one hand, the BMD program of the United States, particularly its cooperative research and development with Japan and its intention to extend the TMD system or transfer the relevant technology to a Chinese island, Taiwan, will encourage hyper-nationalism in Japan and separatism in Taiwan, encroaching upon Chinese national security. On the other hand, this anti-missile shield appears to make China's small nuclear arsenal invalid in its function of deterrence.

Third, the US senate refused the CTBT Treaty in 1999, a treaty that will prevent nuclear-weapon states to improve their nuclear weapons by explosion tests.

Fourth, the Bush administration annulled the ABM treaty last year.

Fifth, some Americans believe that China is changing its policy of minimum deterrence to limited deterrence. In fact, according to their understanding, such limited deterrence means a policy of war-fighting and war-winning. Namely China will change its No-First-Use policy and is going to fight and win a limited nuclear war.

In a sense, both sides have misperceived the intentions and capabilities of each other for offensive aims. These misperceptions not only have violated the stability of nuclear deterrence relationship between China and the United States, but also will exert negative impacts on the whole China-US relations by giving incentives to a new round of complaints and distrust between them.

Therefore, if both of the countries, especially the United States—since it is more powerful and has more policy options than China—can take measures to restore and promote stability of their nuclear relationship, it will be a real blessing to US-China relations.

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² This title was borrowed from Stephen Van Evera's article "Primed for Peace: Europe after the Cold War" (*International Security*, Winter 1990/91) and Aaron L. Friedberg's article "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia" (*International Security*, Winter the 93/94) .

³ Edited by the Foreign Ministry of PRC & Achieves Institute of Central committee of CCP, Selection of Diplomatic Works of Mao Zedong, Beijing, Beijing: Press of Achieves Institute of Central committee of CCP, 1994, pp476-477.