

**UNITED STATES-CHINA RELATIONS:  
COMPARATIVE SECURITY AND  
FOREIGN POLICY PROCESSES**

**Delegation Report by Evan S. Medeiros**

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**PREFACE**

Since the June 1998 U.S.-China summit, Sino-American relations have been plagued with a number of difficulties that have complicated the expansion and further institutionalization of political, economic and military ties between Washington and Beijing. The contentious negotiations over China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO), China's concerns over U.S. ballistic missile defense (BMD) policies, the Cox Committee allegations about Chinese nuclear espionage, accusations of attempted Chinese influence on American elections via illegal campaign contributions, China's crackdown on supporters of a democratic party and practitioners of Falun Gong, and most notably the accidental U.S. bombing of China's embassy

in Belgrade are just some of the issues that have collectively hindered the development of bilateral relations and undermined trust between China and the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Underlying these problematic issues is a far deeper concern: suspicions and differences Washington and Beijing have about each other's foreign and national security policies. The heated debates in the United States about China's future direction as an Asian power and as a potential global challenger are matched by China's concerns about the strengthening of American alliances and possible encirclement, American interventionism, and the American attempt to bolster its security through new missile defense systems.

In an effort to revitalize the bilateral dialogue on these sensitive issues, the National Committee on United States-China Relations sent a seven-member delegation to China to discuss American and Chinese approaches to foreign and national security policy and policy-making. The Americans were chosen to represent the various constituencies that influence U.S. foreign and security policy-making processes. These included the executive branch, the military, the Congress, the media, and the academic/think tank/non-governmental organization (NGO) communities. (See Appendix I for delegation name list.)

The delegation had two main tasks:

- Compare and contrast the U.S. and Chinese systems for making decisions on foreign and national security policy with particular attention to the actors in each system, their influence in the policy-making process, and their influence on each other.
- Conduct in-depth discussions with Chinese officials and experts about substantive policy issues in Sino-American relations, including arms control and nonproliferation, China's policies toward Taiwan, U.S. BMD policies, and the prospects for improving bilateral relations during an American presidential election season.

By focusing on these two tasks, the National Committee delegation sought to accomplish three main goals:

- Develop a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the evolving Chinese system (e.g. actors, roles and influence) for developing and implementing foreign and national security policies. At the same time, help Chinese officials and experts better understand the complexities of the U.S. foreign policy-making system, especially during an election year.
- Isolate some of the key substantive, conceptual, and perceptual differences between the United States and China on foreign and national security policies in an effort to begin to address each nation's concerns.
- Identify themes in foreign and national security policy that would benefit from formal, regularized dialogues.

Meetings took place in both Shanghai and Beijing during the week of January 17-22, 2000. In Shanghai, the delegation participated in a two-day conference attended by several experts from the Shanghai Institute of International Studies (SIIS) [*Shanghai Guoji Wenti Yanjiusuo*] and the Center for American Studies at Fudan University [*Fudan Daxue Meiguo Yanjiu Zhongxin*]. The group also met with scholars from the Shanghai Institute for East Asia Studies [*Shanghai Dong Ya Yanjiusuo*]. This seminar focused on comparing American and Chinese approaches to foreign and national security policy-making.

In Beijing, the delegation had both formal meetings and private discussions with officials from the Foreign Ministry and representatives of influential think tanks including the China Institute of International Strategic Studies (CISS) [*Zhongguo Guoji Zhanlue Xuehui*], the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) [*Zhongguo Xiandai Guoji Guanxi Yanjiusuo*], the Academy of Military Sciences (AMS) [*Jiefangjun Junshi Kexue Yuan*], the Institute of American Studies at the China Academy of Social Sciences (IAS, CASS) [*Meiguo Yanjiusuo, Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Yuan*], and the China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies (FISS) [*Zhongguo Guoji Zhanlue Yanjiu Jijinhui*].

The National Committee gratefully acknowledges the financial support provided by the United States Information Agency for this project. The local support and arrangements of the delegation's Chinese hosts, the Shanghai Institute for Strategic Studies, the Chinese Institute of Contemporary International Relations, and Fudan University made the visit possible and greatly facilitated the group's interaction with Chinese policy-makers and scholars. Finally, the delegation members and their escort, National Committee Vice President Jan Berris, are to be commended for the time, energy, and insights they contributed to these discussions and the preparation of this report.

John L. Holden

New York, March 2000

**UNITED STATES-CHINA RELATIONS:  
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This summary of the delegation's discussions in Shanghai and Beijing is divided into two parts. The first provides a comparison of American and Chinese foreign policy-making processes, based on discussions in Shanghai; the second is an overview of the substantive issues discussed by the delegation with their Chinese counterparts.

**Comparative Approaches to Foreign and National Security Policy-making in the United States and China**

At the outset of the discussions, the participants acknowledged that despite China's rapidly expanding interaction with the international community over the last 20 years, the fundamental differences between U.S. and Chinese foreign and national security policy-making systems remain stark. Three key differences were noted. First, the Chinese policy-making system is closed and the Communist Party still has significant (albeit diminishing) influence over the process, whereas the U.S. system is transparent (though not always understandable) and democratic, with a plethora of actors. Second, the U.S. Congress has substantial influence over the foreign policy-making process through allocation of funds, oversight responsibilities and treaty ratification; in China, the National People's Congress (NPC) has few comparable responsibilities and the Chinese government is not strictly accountable to a national legislature. Third, China's media is largely still controlled by the Communist Party and the government; by contrast the U.S. media is independent of the government and aims to provide the "unvarnished truth" about U.S. foreign affairs. However, all participants acknowledged that changes are occurring in China with respect to some of the above, such as the increasing influence of the NPC, the government's difficulty in maintaining a closed system in light of the information revolution, and moves toward a more independent press.

These fundamental differences aside, the discussions identified two common challenges for foreign policy-makers in the United States and China. First, both the United States and China have to manage the difficulty of pluralized decision-making systems in which multiple actors have influence over the process. This challenge is especially acute in China because this trend represents a gradual shift from the Communist Party's previously centralized control over foreign policy making and because the pluralization of actors involved in foreign policy is proceeding rapidly. Second, foreign policy-making in both nations is complicated by the expanding role of the media and NGOs in this process; again, this trend is particularly prominent in China given the minimal influence of these entities in previous years. These dual challenges are detailed below.

### ***Pluralization of Actors in Foreign and National Security Policy-making***

#### *U.S. Views*

The American delegation sought to explain the complex, multi-tiered, competitive, and fragmented policy-making process in the United States. They stressed that American foreign policy should not be seen as a result of a national consensus and certainly not as part of a well-defined U.S. "global strategy," but rather as a result of significant bargaining both within and among branches of the government.

In an effort to elucidate these trends, members of the U.S. team outlined several characteristics of the executive branch. First, different executive branch actors (e.g. the State Department, the Defense Department, the National Security Council) have different agendas and perspectives on foreign policy and security issues, and, as a result, these actors often disagree on the issue being discussed and the U.S. response to that issue. For example, the U.S. decision to grant China permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) is an issue of Sino-American relations for some, for others it is about U.S. trade with China, for still others it is about domestic politics in the upcoming U.S. election, and for yet others it is about the health of American industry. Second,

many of the actors have different priorities and these differences will determine an organization's stance on a particular issue. Third, most U.S. foreign and national security decision-making takes place in an environment of a high degree of uncertainty about the problem and potential solutions. Given this characteristic, executive branch agencies often disagree about the nature of a given situation (how serious it is) and also about the consequences of decisions. These layers of uncertainty collectively complicate decision-making in the United States.

These elements of competition and confusion in the executive branch are further complicated by two additional factors, which limit the administration's coordination with other branches of the government. First, not all agencies have a role in decisions regardless of real-world linkages between issues. For example, China watchers in the government have until recently had a limited role in U.S. decisions about deploying a national missile defense (NMD) system even though such a decision has major implications for Sino-American strategic stability. Second, and more salient, although the president is the most important person on foreign policy issues, his authority is limited by congressional oversight and accountability to the public and the media. The president must comply with laws that can force him to make controversial foreign policy decisions, such as those regarding the imposition of economic sanctions. And the media can force the president to address certain issues by raising public awareness and concern about them. These factors foster an environment in which U.S. foreign and security policies result from a high degree of fragmentation, confusion, and extensive bargaining among the various actors.

Beyond the executive branch, the Congress has a unique role in making American foreign policy, especially compared with other national legislatures. The delegation stressed that the power of the U.S. Congress makes it one of the strongest legislatures in the world and that the Senate is the most powerful upper chamber in the world. Much of the Senate's influence comes from the fact that it not only possesses the same powers as the House, but that it also wields additional influence on foreign policy through its treaty ratification powers and its responsibility for reviewing and approving all senior-level executive branch appointees, including ambassadors. In terms of the "workings" of the Congress, the delegation noted several factors: the Congress is inherently political and acts based on political instincts, not on a coherent concept of national interest; there is a constant struggle for power between the executive and legislative branches; in contrast to previous years, there is now less party discipline, with many members' actions based on a variety of factors, including constituent demands, regional concerns, individual belief systems, and self-interest; it is a fundamentally reactive institution which responds to outside events most members of Congress were elected in campaigns that focused on domestic issues; and many have never traveled outside the United States and are younger and less experienced than their predecessors. The latter four factors, in particular, have created a general indifference to foreign policy concerns in the Congress and an unfortunate lack of current information about international affairs or other countries' views of the United States and its actions. This tendency is further strengthened – not only in Congress but among the constituencies it represents – in times of relative peace and domestic prosperity when there is little of looming concern on the foreign and security policy horizon.

*Chinese Views*

The Chinese participants discussed broad trends – not specific details – of the changes within China's foreign policy-making community. They explained that China's foreign policy decision-making system is currently undergoing three trends simultaneously: *pluralization*, *institutionalization*, and *professionalization*. In terms of pluralization, the number and variety of actors involved in decision-making in China continue to expand rapidly and now include non-government (or quasi-government) actors. For example, large civilian and military corporations in China have *de facto* involvement in China's foreign affairs by virtue of their business dealings with other countries. Several scholars noted that this pluralization of actors has directly resulted from China's growing economic, political, and military interactions with the world; as China opened up in the 1980s, its foreign policy interests proliferated as national, regional, and local actors all began to interact with the international community.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of *institutionalization*, a variety of inter-agency organizations have been set up in recent years to shift power and influence from individuals to institutions involved in foreign policy-making. In particular, Chinese scholars noted the recent formation of several functional bureaus in the Foreign Ministry, such as the new arms control and disarmament department (*junkong si*), which have begun to transfer influence away from the regional bureaus. In addition, formerly moribund institutions have started to assume an increasingly important role in Chinese foreign affairs. An obvious example is the National People's Congress: Chinese officials and scholars argued that it is no longer a rubber stamp and that a number of retired military and Foreign Ministry officials (e.g. Li Daoyu, China's former Ambassador to the United States) play an active role on the NPC's Foreign Affairs Committee.

Another key aspect of this institutionalization trend has been the development of horizontal linkages between institutions in China's foreign policy community. These linkages have reduced the degree of "stove piping" in the Chinese system and have enhanced policy coordination. A related but distinct aspect of these linkages has been the high degree of consensual decision-making in China – at both the working and senior levels. Recent reports indicate that Chinese officials are considering the formation of a National Security Council (NSC) similar to the U.S. one in order to coordinate national security decision-making at the highest levels. Also, Chinese experts added that given the absence of a paramount leader like Mao Zedong or Deng Xiaoping, foreign policy-making at the senior levels in China is increasingly characterized by discussion, debate, bargaining, and logrolling within key institutions such as the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group and the Politburo Standing Committee.

Lastly, the Chinese experts discussed the growing *professionalization* of China's foreign policy and military officials. Many of them are graduates of China's top universities with extensive training in both international affairs and foreign languages; many mid-level officials have spent time in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries studying for advanced degrees or have held positions as visiting scholars at foreign institutions. For example, the Chinese military each year sends a number of officers to the U.K. to study for master's degrees; select senior officers attend a one-week program on international security at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. The Chinese participants noted that as China's senior leaders age over the next decade, a cadre of internationally oriented officials will replace them.

## *The Changing Roles of the Media and Non-Governmental Organizations<sup>3</sup>*

### *Chinese Views*

Many of the Chinese participants noted that an interesting aspect of the pluralization trend discussed above is that the media and think tanks in China have assumed increasing influence in foreign policy-making. These new roles challenge the current government to construct a consistent Chinese foreign policy, which not only supports China's "national goals" but also satisfies China's various interests of economic, political, and military constituencies.

China's mass media is roughly divided into government and "gray area" media. The government media is controlled by the Communist Party's propaganda system and is comprised of three main parts: the Ministry of Information Industry which controls radio and TV broadcasts; the State Council Information Office, which regulates print media such as *Renmin Ribao* and which also controls a number of research institutes; and *Xinhua* Press Agency, which not only controls China's reporting on international events but also publishes prominent books such as the "Four Wrongs" series. The "gray area" media in China is comprised of two parts: the Internet and *xiao bao* or "small newspapers." The Internet and particularly Internet bulletin boards in China are becoming an increasingly influential source of news and analysis for interested lay people as well as scholars. The Chinese participants cautioned that the United States pays too much attention to the *xiao bao* in trying to understand Beijing's views, especially regarding Taiwan policy. While the *xiao bao* are not as unreliable as American tabloids, they are often based on uninformed reporting and can be highly propagandistic.

The mass media in China generally performs two main functions. It serves as an organ of the government and the Communist Party, and it supplies information and analysis to China's leaders. The latter function is mainly carried out through *Xinhua* reporting and *Xinhua* research organs which produce classified reports for senior leaders.

In addition to these traditional roles, the Chinese participants highlighted some of the new roles for China's mass media. First, China's "gray area" media sources have increasingly begun to shape and influence public opinion and public support for government policies: information distribution is no longer limited by rank and now anyone can get access to such reports. Second, the mass media in China has closer links to the academic community, which results in more informed and less biased reporting. In fact, many academics from prominent think tanks in Shanghai and Beijing now provide commentary to local TV and radio talk shows and write op-eds in local newspapers. Third, Chinese officials are increasingly using the mass media to influence the views of overseas Chinese.

The information age and the emergence of the Internet have also provided new challenges for China's media community. First, competition with foreign reporters based in Beijing, whose reports appear on the Internet, has placed greater pressure on the Chinese media for more balanced reporting. Second, Chinese reporters now have to compete with Chinese news sources on the Internet. Third, Chinese news reports have been too heavily focused on domestic audiences and more attention needs to be paid to reports that foreign experts and officials can understand.

The changing roles of Chinese research organizations and think tanks were also discussed. In general terms, the Chinese participants explained that foreign policy think tanks in China have proliferated in recent years, their issue coverage has expanded greatly (especially in the functional areas such as arms control and nonproliferation), and government officials increasingly rely on the reports and opinions of non-government experts. Several Chinese NGOs have also begun to serve the important role of explaining the context and nuances behind the official government policy, which is often presented in a uniform and heavy-handed manner. However, few Chinese think tanks have reached the level of independence and/or influence of many U.S. experts and research organizations.

Due to China's expanding foreign policy interests, Chinese officials have come to rely on academic experts more than in the past. These experts normally play a role in policy-making through both formal and informal channels. As in the United States, the personal relationships between academics and officials are a determining factor in the degree of access and influence of a particular expert or institution. (For example, scholars in Shanghai noted that their influence in Beijing is largely based on their ties to three senior Chinese officials, all former Shanghai majors: Jiang Zemin, Zhu Rongji, and Wang Daohan.) The channels for Chinese experts to provide information and advice to the government can take the form of research papers or publications provided to officials or by participation in internal meetings and conferences when important decisions are pending. For example, a small group of China's top America-watchers gathered in spring 1999 to provide advice on whether Premier Zhu Rongji should proceed with his planned trip to the United States in light of the Cox Committee Report, allegations of Chinese nuclear espionage, and NATO involvement in Kosovo.

Unlike the U.S. think tank community, however, very few foreign policy scholars have been asked to join the government. There is no "revolving door" phenomenon in China's foreign policy-making sphere. This is in contrast to the area of legal studies, where several academics have taken positions in the government.

### *U.S. Views*

The American delegation stressed that the American media is fundamentally driven by the pursuit of a good story: one that exposes something; tells an uplifting, heartrending, outrageous or amusing tale; or explains issues or events of broad relevance. Most reporters probably favor harmonious relations between the United States and China. It is not their job, however, to actively promote those good relations. Nor is it their job to destroy them. Most legitimate American journalists take seriously their responsibility within the American constitutional system. They try to be impartial actors seeking to reflect at least the key sides of a story. The reality is, of course, that no matter how high-minded the principle, journalists are imperfect human beings. They sometimes make mistakes, they sometimes can be intimidated, they sometimes fall victim to excessive competition and greed, and there are some who operate from an ideological bias that predisposes them to view – and report on – world events in a particular way. But the American system strives (though not always successfully) to confine the latter to editorial and opinion pages.



These and other factors shape the way international issues, including those that affect Sino-American relations, are covered by the media in the United States and overseas. The media expert in the delegation noted that the Cox Report was a media-driven story in which reporting from *The New York Times* prompted establishment of the Cox Committee and investigation of allegations of Chinese nuclear espionage. It is important to underscore that the American media, despite its sometimes pack-like quality, is not a monolith but rather messy and fractured.

The U.S. delegation further highlighted the mixed benefits of an open press. On the one hand, a key advantage of an open press is that it constantly pushes the government to clarify its views and to publicly justify its policies. On the other hand, the media sometimes has a strong – almost determinative – influence on the agenda of senior U.S. foreign policy officials because they are so highly sensitive to the press. Occasionally the media can set the agenda in ways that are not entirely consistent with U.S. national interests.

Another significant factor in the American foreign policy-making process is the NGO community, in this case think tanks, academia, and special interest groups. Think tanks play several roles, including facilitating debate and critique of government policies, providing "big picture" analyses and forward thinking for government officials, and giving non-partisan and objective analysis of government policy-making. (It should be noted, however, that many American think tanks are clearly identified with a particular worldview.) The U.S. think tank community exercises its influence through a variety of channels including task forces; roundtable discussions; opinion sharing; publication of monographs, books, and articles in the media; and by working as government consultants. Yet, this community's influence is limited to changing policy over the medium to long-term; its work seldom has an immediate and tangible impact. Furthermore, the degree of influence of this community is determined by the types of expertise on a particular issue, the "hotness" of an issue, the credibility of the institution, and the personal access and connections of scholars to government officials and the media.

The presentations illuminated some key differences and similarities between the Chinese and American NGO communities: NGOs in China are not as large, well-established, or well-funded as in the United States, and, in most cases, their degree of freedom from the government is not as great. For instance, many Chinese think tanks either function as the research arm of a government organization or conduct contract work for the government. And, with very rare exceptions, special interest groups in China still must have the patronage of a government agency. This obviously reduces the ability for impartial and critical analysis of government policies and for exerting pressure to change such policies. In terms of similarities, the channels of influence through informal contacts, formal conferences, and publications are similar in both countries; the importance of personal relationships (*guanxi wang*) between individuals and government institutions is common to both the U.S. and Chinese systems.

### ***Implications***

The preceding summary and analysis point to several implications for the United States and China. First, unless the pluralization of the Chinese policy-making system is accompanied by a concomitant transparency, it will become even more difficult for outsiders to understand the internal dynamics and motivations driving China's foreign and security policy making processes

and the relative influence of Chinese institutions such as the Foreign Ministry, the Trade Ministry, and the military community.

Second, based on the delegation's discussions it appears that many Chinese have developed a more nuanced understanding of the American political system and its influence on policies toward China. For example, almost all of the group's interlocutors acknowledged that during an election year the anti-China rhetoric may increase but that it would have little significant effect on Sino-American relations. It also was clear that many of China's America-watchers are gradually beginning to understand the degree of autonomy, power, and influence the Congress possesses over the foreign policy agenda, particularly regarding policy on Taiwan. But there still are those who fail to understand this, and the group did hear the suggestion that the president could limit or moderate congressional support for Taiwan if he *really* desired such an outcome.

Third, as Chinese and American leaders continue to manage the challenge of pluralization, both will face the problem of an increasingly blurred distinction between domestic and foreign policy. The Chinese pointed out that their leaders now pay much more attention to the domestic implications of Chinese foreign policy decisions. One of the reasons that negotiating the WTO deal with the United States was so difficult was because it was intimately tied to the scale and pace of the central government's economic reform effort. In negotiating the deal, the government sought to simultaneously improve relations with the United States and shore up support for the government's economic reform program. In another example, PRC leaders have become sensitive to the public reaction to Chinese policies toward Taiwan's status and the Sino-Japanese Diaoyu/Senkaku islands dispute and have leveraged these issues to increase support for Chinese nationalism. In broader terms, the government's legitimacy also relies on a popular perception of its continued ability to defend China's core foreign policy principals of sovereignty and territorial integrity, providing further linkages between domestic politics and foreign policy.

### **Key Foreign And Security Policy Issues In United States-China Relations**

The delegation discussed a variety of substantive, policy-relevant issues with officials and experts in both Shanghai and Beijing. An overview of Chinese opinions on these issues is presented below. As background it should be noted that a constant theme was that China has reconfirmed that "peace and development" remain the dominant trends in the world and therefore economic modernization remains the top priority. The implied messages were that Taiwan notwithstanding, the PRC would not be allocating significantly more resources into military modernization and its domestic preoccupations preclude any thought of meddling beyond China's borders.

#### ***Arms Control and Nonproliferation***<sup>4</sup>

Chinese officials and experts were highly pessimistic about the future of Sino-American cooperation on arms control and nonproliferation and they attributed this sentiment to U.S. policies and actions. Their heavy pessimism was mixed with a willingness and desire at senior

levels in the Foreign Ministry to renew bilateral arms control and nonproliferation dialogues, which have not occurred since November 1998.

Many Chinese officials noted that while in the past the United States and China have cooperated on several key issues such as the indefinite extension of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT), conclusion of a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and the United Nations Security Council's harsh response to nuclear testing in India and Pakistan, in recent years the Chinese consensus supporting bilateral arms control and nonproliferation cooperation has begun to erode. A senior Chinese arms control official characterized Sino-American discussions on arms control as being at a crossroad (*shizi lukou*).

Chinese officials highlighted three U.S. policies as the source of their concern and pessimism. First, U.S. bilateral discussions with India following its nuclear tests in May 1998 have helped validate the Indian claim to nuclear weapon status. The United States, Chinese officials argued, is seeking to cap the Indian arsenal at a level sufficient for India to deter/threaten China but not enough to compromise American interests (suggesting to them that U.S.-Indian discussions may be part of an American containment strategy by engaging India as a hedge against China). Several Chinese noted that these U.S. efforts to engage India on its nuclear status appear to contradict American emphasis on nuclear nonproliferation. Furthermore, the U.S. dialogue with India has dealt "a heavy blow" to global nonproliferation and disarmament efforts. Chinese officials universally stressed that the United States should stick to the goals outlined in U.N. Security Council Resolution 1172 (drafted by a senior Chinese Foreign Ministry official) which calls for a complete roll-back of the Indian and Pakistani nuclear weapon programs.

Second, Chinese officials and experts stressed that the U.S. military campaign in Serbia significantly undermined global missile nonproliferation efforts and served to advertise missiles as a highly effective and efficient military tool. In addition, they argued that the Kosovo campaign provided significant incentives for small nations to develop weapons of mass destruction because NATO military actions demonstrated that the United States and its allies can and will intervene anywhere and at anytime to protect their broadly defined interests. This will lead to more pressure for military buildup and arms races in regions all over the world.

Third, all of the Chinese officials and scholars the delegation met indicated that U.S. national missile defense (NMD) and theatre missile defense (TMD) policies could erase all previous bilateral achievements on arms control and nonproliferation and seriously disrupt Sino-American relations. They noted that the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty is the cornerstone of strategic stability and that without it all future progress in international arms control could be halted. Some Chinese painted a worst case scenario in which the American deployment of an NMD system would eventually result in a collapse of global nonproliferation efforts and the gradual emergence of new nuclear weapon states all over the world.

### ***U.S. NMD and TMD Policies***

The Chinese articulated a common set of arguments concerning NMD: it would collapse the international arms control agenda, would lead to gradual nuclear proliferation all over the world, is not needed (North Korea, Iran, and Iraq pose little threat to the United States), and is targeted

at China.<sup>5</sup> Beyond these classic critiques, many also offered more nuanced and detailed explanations regarding China's opposition to NMD.

First, it was indicated that much of China's recent and unusually public diplomacy opposing NMD was meant to inject Chinese concerns into the U.S. debate. There is frustration that NMD discussions in the Congress and in the Clinton administration have been proceeding without consideration of China's potential reaction. In response to questions from the American delegation about the aims and direction of China's anti-NMD strategy, it was explained that Beijing's public opposition is not necessarily aimed at convincing the U.S. to cancel its NMD plans but rather to ensure that China's opposition is considered. It was indicated that the Chinese government's strategy on NMD is still evolving and that some of the vociferous opposition to NMD has also been for domestic audiences. In fact, Chinese leaders are still searching for the right strategy to address America's NMD plans. China's current anti-NMD diplomatic strategy, which has largely consisted of harsh rhetoric, is a means not an end.

Second, some of the delegation's interlocutors linked China's concerns about NMD to the Taiwan issue. These scholars indicated that the core fear at the heart of China's opposition to NMD is that such a system could leave China vulnerable to "nuclear blackmail" in the event of a crisis over Taiwan. The United States could use nuclear threats to prevent escalation during a conflict in the Taiwan Strait knowing China's response would be rendered useless by an NMD system.<sup>6</sup>

Third, several Chinese officials indicated that although NMD has become an increasingly contentious issue ("it is almost to the point of no return"), there is still room for negotiation. While Chinese officials expressed a strong skepticism about America's credibility in upholding its commitments, they are waiting to see what the United States proposes in future bilateral dialogues on missile defenses.

Lastly, Chinese scholars with close ties to the government indicated that Beijing might look positively on a political statement that sought to assure Chinese leaders that NMD is not targeted at China and that its goal is not to neutralize China's strategic deterrent. This could take the form of a statement (possibly part of a June 2000 announcement to proceed with NMD deployment) in which the Clinton administration acknowledges the concerns in "certain capitals" regarding NMD and agrees to take these concerns into account as deployment proceeds (possibly through discussions about the siting and size of NMD interceptors).

Chinese concerns about TMD were focused almost exclusively on Taiwan with little mention of U.S. cooperation with Japan or concern over North Korea. They stressed that U.S. sales of TMD systems to Taiwan would cause serious and unprecedented disruptions in Sino-American relations. One senior official called it "a last straw." Their views indicated that TMD in Taiwan is a strictly political issue about improved U.S.-Taiwan military ties and encouragement of Taiwan independence; it is not about the cross-Strait military balance. None of the Chinese officials acknowledged the distinction between independent "lower-tier" systems and integrated "upper-tier" systems, since they regard both as entailing closer ties between the American and Taiwan militaries. The Chinese oppose all forms of TMD deployed in Taiwan and none of their statements to the delegation indicated room for negotiation. Moreover, the delegation's

discussions throughout the week indicated a clear Chinese rejection of the U.S. position that the PAC-3 system is an autonomous, point-defense system that will not increase military ties between the United States and Taiwan. Rather, it is likely seen as one step toward the eventual inclusion of Taiwan in an "upper-tier" system which might require ongoing cooperation with the U.S. military, particularly the use of U.S. satellites for cueing purposes.

### ***Taiwan***

The delegation heard a much less strident and more moderate tone on Taiwan compared with Chinese rhetoric in previous months. Chinese officials and scholars emphasized the goal of peaceful reunification and seldom mentioned Beijing's threat to use force to prevent Taiwanese moves toward independence. There was a distinct shift away from emotional rhetoric and an emphasis on identifying a process that would eventually lead to reunification. In this vein, the Chinese did not convey a sense of urgency following the return of Hong Kong and Macao to Chinese control and the delegation heard no discussion of a "count-down clock" on Taiwan. By contrast, many Chinese officials noted that Taiwan should be dealt with in a patient manner, and they importantly acknowledged the high degree of political and economic convergence between China and Taiwan that would have to occur before reunification was practical and feasible. Some experts even discussed specific timelines that ranged from 20 to 50 years before both sides would be prepared for reunification.

Furthermore, the comments by many Chinese indicated a new flexibility in China's position on the formula for reunification. Chinese officials and scholars emphasized the need for Beijing to develop an incentives-based approach that seeks to encourage Taiwan to want reunification as opposed to previous Chinese policies which emphasized preventing/deterring Taiwanese independence. Citing Jiang Zemin's New Year's day speech, many scholars indicated that senior Chinese leaders would be very flexible in applying the "one country, two systems" [*yi guo liang zhi*] model to Taiwan in a manner different than in Hong Kong or Macao.<sup>7</sup> Some scholars at prominent think tanks indicated that as long as Taiwan accepted the "one country, two systems" principle, Beijing would be willing to accept virtually any interpretation of that model. This model must remain the core strategy for Beijing for domestic political reasons (i.e., regime legitimacy) but its implementation can be very flexible.

Regarding the upcoming election in Taiwan, Chinese officials and experts indicated a "wait-and-see" attitude about the next Taiwanese leader. Many expressed a concern that the lead-up to the election is a potentially dangerous period. The principal Chinese fear – as expressed by both officials and prominent scholars – was that prior to the March election President Lee would be emboldened by U.S. congressional actions to make even further moves toward independence; these could take the form of attempting to entrench the "special state-to-state" principle in Taiwanese law or in Nationalist Party documents. The delegation heard very little discussion of a need for large military exercises such as the ones that preceded the 1996 Taiwanese elections. Chinese scholars also avoided discussing a victory by the Democratic Progressive Party in apocalyptic terms.<sup>8</sup>

### ***U.S. Elections and Politics***

In discussions about the upcoming presidential election in the United States, Chinese experts expressed very moderate and informed attitudes about American electoral politics. Many acknowledged that they should not take seriously U.S. campaign rhetoric about China and that after the election China policy would not likely change in a dramatic way. The Americans explained that George W. Bush's characterization of China as a "competitor" should be interpreted in a neutral way. For example, businesses and sports teams compete; America's closest allies are also its economic competitors. Thus, this term should not be seen as promoting an adversarial or confrontational relationship with China.<sup>9</sup> It was unclear whether the Chinese accepted this distinction.<sup>10</sup>

However, concern was expressed that if both the President and the Congress were Republican, there would be a loss of "balance" in America's China policy. In such a scenario, congressional anti-China or pro-Taiwan policies might resonate more with a Republican president and thus lead to a gradual deterioration in bilateral relations. In response to this concern, the U.S. delegation noted that because the current congressional anti-China sentiments are so politically oriented toward weakening the Democratic Party and President Clinton, these sentiments and policies would likely be significantly lessened under a Republican administration.

The delegation also discussed the politics surrounding the upcoming congressional vote on Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) for China. Delegation members suggested the likelihood that *when* PNTR came to a vote it would pass, but that it is very unclear just when that would happen. The Chinese seemed to be genuinely surprised and dismayed when the delegation expressed the possibility that the PNTR vote might not take place this year.<sup>11</sup> It was explained that while the administration wants to have the vote as early as possible (to minimize the damage to electoral politics), opponents hope to have the vote as close as possible to the November elections (so as to use it as a political issue). But those politics aside, Congress may not take up the issues until China and the European Union resolve their bilateral WTO discussions. The Chinese also were not particularly comforted – or perhaps persuaded – by the delegation's assurances that any delays would have little or nothing to do with U.S. attitudes toward China or that, barring any dramatic international developments, PNTR will pass when it comes to a vote.

## **Summary**

Although the delegation was in China only briefly, it had an opportunity to engage in open, frank discussions with a variety of people in academia, government, and policy organizations. There were useful exchanges on several major security-related issues between the United States and China. The overall impression was that while these issues – Taiwan, NMD, TMD, U.S. hegemonism – and the Chinese positions on them have not changed, the rhetoric used to address them was far less strident than in the recent past. The Chinese gave the impression of being much more anxious to eliminate the confrontational nature of the Sino-American dialogue that has been the norm since the embassy bombing last May (indeed it was striking that that subject was rarely mentioned); they appeared to want to put that event behind them and move on.

However, the much more measured demeanor and lowered volume does not necessarily mean that the Chinese now view the United States in more positive terms. Indeed, it may indicate a growing concern (and perhaps even anxiety) about what the PRC views as trends adverse to

Chinese interests that derive from the state of its relations with the United States and from its failure to make any progress in creating a "multipolar" international order to counter American "hegemonism."

The Chinese may have concluded that a shift to a more reassuring demeanor might decrease the chances both of China becoming an issue in the upcoming campaign and of Beijing getting off on the wrong foot with the new administration. If so, we should expect continuing interest by Beijing in a more stable relationship with Washington.

### **DELEGATION MEMBERS**

**Dr. Arnold Kanter** (*delegation head*) is concurrently a Senior Fellow at the Forum for International Policy; a principal in The Scowcroft Group, an international consulting firm; and a Senior Fellow at the RAND Corporation. From October 1991 to January 1993, he served as Under Secretary for Political Affairs, the State Department's third-ranking official. Previously, he served at the National Security Council as Special Assistant to President George Bush. While at RAND between 1985 and 1989, Dr. Kanter was Director of the National Security Strategies Program and Associate Director of the International Security and Defense Program. From 1977 to 1985, he served in a variety of positions in the State Department with responsibility for political-military affairs. Before first entering the government, Dr. Kanter was a member of the staff of the Brookings Institution (1969-1971) and a faculty member of Ohio State University (1971-1972) and the University of Michigan (1972-1977).

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