

# The Role of the United States in a New East Asian Security Order: A Chinese View

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Chinese perceptions of the role of the United States in global and regional affairs are circumscribed not only by international factors but also by domestic determinants in China that define its national priorities. Careful observers of Chinese affairs would not fail to notice the emerging diversity of views and interests in a more pluralistic Chinese society. To be sure, the polity of China continues to be unitary in essence. However, as more and more government agencies and social groupings have been involved in China's relations with the United States, and as some of the major issues in this domain (such as China's entry into the World Trade Organization) concern China's domestic policies, it becomes a daunting task to formulate coherent and unitary policy thinking and to coordinate actions relevant to China's relations with the major powers in Asia.

In addition, there have been heated discussions and debates over foreign policies in some popular Chinese newspapers, magazines, and a number of scholarly journals. Foreign officials, analysts, and journalists seem to have a hard time adjusting themselves to this new phenomenon in China. They have been used to identifying "*the* official line" in "authoritative" Chinese publications. Now that some puzzling variations and inconsistencies are found in Chinese publications, they still tend to point to "*changes*" in China's official line. Alternatively, some observers try to link individual views in Chinese publications to the authors' official affiliation, which is often irrelevant. Consequently, confusion and misinterpretations arise.

Given such a complex situation, this paper attempts to present China's mainstream official views while recognizing the ramifications and adjustments of policy thinking where they do exist. Most source materials in this paper are drawn from Chinese publications after the NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia on May 8, 1999, an incident that provoked serious discussions in China about relations with the United States as well as the changes in international politics against the general background of globalization.

## I. General Perceptions

In October 2000, the Chinese leadership held widely reported activities to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of China's participation in the Korean War, known in China as the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea. It was reemphasized that the War was a just, necessary

and victorious war that smashed the attempt by U.S. imperialism to occupy Korea and invade China. According to the official justification, not only did the War safeguard Chinese sovereignty and international security, but also it also greatly ignited patriotic enthusiasm among the Chinese people and speeded up the development of national economy. The highlighted commemorations of the Korean War were partly a response to “some people” (definitely referring to some Chinese) who had “distorted the cause of sending Chinese troops and denied the historic significance of the War.”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, except for the period of time when Beijing and Washington formed an informal alignment against Moscow in the 1970s-1980s, the PRC since its founding in 1949 has perceived the United States as a very negative force in East Asian security affairs.<sup>2</sup> The Chinese always link their contention with the United States to the modern history of China being bullied and humiliated by Western powers. The Chinese description of the United States as conducting policies of hegemonism and power politics reflects a deep-rooted resentment against U.S. efforts to dominate the world at the expense of China and other developing countries. Anti-hegemonism is an important tenet in China’s foreign policy announcements along with a desire to formulate a multipolar political world.

As is viewed by a Chinese scholar, the rivalry between the PRC and the United States stems first of all from their contradicting ideologies, values, and political systems.<sup>3</sup> Since the end of the Cold War, despite the hope held by some Chinese that the ideological legacy in international relations would fade away, what the Chinese refer to as the “Cold-War mentality” has lingered on. China-U.S. relations have been constantly overshadowed by the human rights issue, which, in Chinese eyes, is used as an instrument to undermine the authority of the Chinese leadership.

In addition to America’s support to the Tiananmen political dissidents and the Dalai Lama, newer issues like *Falun Gong*, separatist elements in some national minority areas, and illegal religious activities in China further complicate the political relationship between Beijing and Washington. The Chinese authorities are resolved to guard against America’s political, ideological, and cultural infiltration through the Internet. Furthermore, the American attitude toward the Taiwan issue is seen as being tainted by the image that Taiwan as a

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, a collection of articles under the general title “Commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Korean War” in *Dangdai Zhongguo Shi Yanjiu* (Contemporary China History Studies), No. 6 (2000), pp. 6-83.

<sup>2</sup> For my own account of America’s image in China, see Wang Jisi, “The role of the United States as a global and Pacific power: a view from China”, *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 10, No. 10 (1997), pp. 1-18.

<sup>3</sup> Wang Weiguang, “Kunjing yu xuanze: lengzhan hou Zhongguo dui Mei waijiao (Dilemmas and Options: post-Cold War Chinese foreign policy toward the United States)”, *Zhanlue Yu Guanli* (Strategy and Management), No. 3 (2000), p. 78.

“democratic” entity is threatened by an intolerant, “authoritarian” regime in Beijing. Thus the United States not simply poses a grave threat to China’s national security; more importantly, it threatens the very survival of the leadership of the Communist Party. In recent years the Chinese leadership has put more emphasis on American attempts to Westernize the Chinese state and interference in China’s domestic affairs. Beijing has been particularly sensitive to the interventionist tendencies in U.S. diplomacy. Its emotional reaction to the Kosovo conflict in 1999 and furious criticism of the theory of “human rights preceding sovereign rights” embodied an increasingly important impact of domestic concerns on China’s foreign policy.

The NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in May 1999 did a devastating damage to the China-U.S. relationship. The vast majority of Chinese, officials and public citizens alike, were convinced that the missile attack was intentional rather than accidental. The tragedy reminded them of China’s humiliation in modern history, and of its current insecurity caused by the United States, which possesses a formidable military machine and seems ready to use it to seek domination of world politics today. More fundamentally, the United States is able to impose the international norms in its favor on the United Nations and other international organizations.

The embassy bombing incident triggered, and to a large extent surfaced, an open and heated policy debate among Chinese observers and specialists. Essentially, the debate focused on whether China’s security surroundings were deteriorating to such a degree that the previous judgment of a conducive international environment should be reconsidered and that China should get prepared for a major conflict with the United States. The controversy subsided gradually toward the end of 1999 but some resonance has lingered on to date.<sup>4</sup>

This unprecedented debate was theoretical and analytical in form but policy-oriented in content. Those who depicted the international strategic situation as increasingly ominous argued that the Kosovo War exposed the danger of war between China and the United States. They ridiculed the characterization of the present time in world history an “epoch of peace and development,” saying such characterization was at best “wishful thinking.” Their contention implied, and some contenders even directly proposed, that China’s international strategy should be readjusted to meet the war danger, which could mean a reversal of the domestic policies of reform and opening carried out since the end of the Cultural Revolution.

In contrast, many specialists referred to Deng Xiaoping’s description of “peace and development” as two major issues of the world today. They pointed to the fact the Communist

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<sup>4</sup> For a good and nuanced discussion of the debate, see Jiang Changbin, “A summary of the controversy over the past year,” *Shijie Zhishi* (World Affairs), No. 15 (2000), pp. 8-11. For a variety of Chinese views and accounts of the Kosovo conflict, see Wang Yizhou, ed., *Danji Shijie de Yinmai: Kesuowo Weiji de Jingshi* (The Cloud of the Unipolar World: the Admonition of the Kosovo Crisis), (Beijing: China Social Sciences Documentation Publishing House, 1999).

Party documents repeatedly stated that “peace and development are two major themes of the present time.” They claimed that their point was reaffirmed by a Communist Party press communiqué in November 1999, six months after the embassy bombing incident. Those who defended the theme of peace and development contended that U.S. hegemonism was not potent enough to interfere at will in other countries’ domestic affairs and therefore a major conflict with it was not imminent and could be avoided. Furthermore, they remarked that a misjudgment of the world situation would mislead China’s domestic policies away from concentrating on economic development. By 2000, such moderate and relatively optimistic voices seemed to have prevailed.

It is noteworthy, however, that the Kosovo conflict did cause some readjustment in China’s evaluation of the international strategic balance and its own security surroundings. This readjustment was also a reaction to the expansion of NATO, the consolidation of U.S.-Japan alliance, the likelihood of deployment of American missile defense system, and the coming of power of a pro-independence political party in Taiwan. A natural consequence of this readjustment is the increase of China’s defense budget and the determination to speed up the modernization programs of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA).

Meanwhile, with the United States being the largest economic partner of China,<sup>5</sup> Beijing definitely desires to maintain a stable political relationship with Washington to further their cooperation in a variety of fields. China-U.S. commercial ties will be further strengthened after China’s entry into WTO. In other words, the economic factor, joined by cooperation between the two over non-traditional security issues such as drug trafficking, illegal immigration, ecology, and international terrorism, serves as a cushion against head-on political or military collision between the two powers. China and the United States also share some common security interests in regional security issues, including saliently the maintenance of peace in Korea and South Asia.

Apart from economic motivations and the realization of shared strategic interests with America, sobering assessments of the international balance of power also provide an important rationale of not confronting the United States in global affairs. As a leading Chinese analyst noted, it is not feasible and advisable, at least not in current circumstances, for China and Russia to establish a security alliance against the United States. Moreover, although many developing countries are unwilling to accept U.S. domination of world affairs, their foreign policies still tend to tilt toward the West when the strategic balance today is in favor of the Western world led by the United States. An anti-U.S. “united front” is therefore not a practical

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<sup>5</sup> The total trade volume between the United States and China has exceeded that between Japan and China according to U.S. statistics, and the United States is the largest foreign investor in China.

consideration.<sup>6</sup>

## II. The Taiwan Issue

The Taiwan issue remains the most sensitive and thorny problem between the United States and the PRC. In Chinese eyes, the United States constitutes the greatest external obstacle to the national reunification with Taiwan. The Chinese apprehensions about separatist tendencies in Taiwan are dominating Beijing's strategic thinking on the role of the United States in East Asia.

Chinese strategic thinkers generally recognize that Washington's policy toward Taiwan is subordinated to its policy toward the PRC. During the early Cold War years when Washington conducted the policy of containing and isolating the PRC, Washington officially recognized Taipei as representing China and treated Taiwan as a stronghold to resist "Communist aggression." After Beijing and Washington reached a rapprochement for the common strategic interest to hold back Soviet influences, the U.S. government recognized the PRC as the sole legal government of China and severed its diplomatic relationship with Taipei in 1979. Since then, U.S. policy toward Taiwan has swung back and forth in accordance largely with America's relations with the Chinese mainland. For example, when the two governments decided to "build toward a constructive strategic partnership" after President Jiang Zemin and President Bill Clinton exchanged state visits in 1997 and 1998, Washington appeared firmer in its commitment to the One China Principle. President Clinton made a pledge in Shanghai in July 1998 that his government would uphold the principle of "three no's" – no support for Taiwan independence, no support for "two Chinas" or "one China, one Taiwan" scenarios, and no support for Taiwan's membership in international organizations requiring a statehood.

The vacillations of China-U.S. relations foretell that U.S. attitude and policy toward Taiwan will continue to fluctuate. A leading America watcher in Beijing remarked that the United States currently carries on a dual strategy of engaging China and preventing China from rising into a great power that will challenge America's "leadership role" in the region. Such a dual strategy has redefined U.S. policy toward Taiwan. On the one hand, Washington is taking advantage of the Taiwan issue to curb the PRC's international influences. On the other hand, the Americans will not allow the Taiwan problem to disrupt its overall relationship with China.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Yan Xuetong, "Lengzhan hou de zhuyao guoji zhengzhi maodun (The major international contradiction in the post-Cold War world)", *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* (Contemporary International Relations), No. 6 (2000), pp. 1-12.

<sup>7</sup> Chu Shulong, "Lengzhanhou Zhongmei shuangbian he diqu zhanlue yu anquan guanxi(Post-Cold War China-U.S. bilateral relations and regional security)," *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* (Contemporary International Relations), No. 5 (2000), p. 14.

A widely shared Chinese conclusion is that U.S. policy toward Taiwan is designed to preserve the status quo of “three no’s” — no reunification, no independence, no war.<sup>8</sup> However, Chinese analysts differ in their assessments of the implications and consequences of this policy of status quo. Some emphasize the congruence of interests and goals of the PRC and the United States over the Taiwan issue, noting that both powers want to maintain stability in the Taiwan Strait and to promote exchanges and dialogues between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan. One scholar found it possible to push U.S. Taiwan policy toward a “readjustment in a positive direction” by improving the overall China-U.S. relationship and broadening their consensus over the Taiwan issue.<sup>9</sup> Another scholar put forward the scenario that with the enhancement of China’s comprehensive national power and international status, the United States will have to take the PRC’s interests in Taiwan more seriously into consideration. If this trend continues, he predicted, it will be more likely for the United States to restrain Taiwan’s effort for secession and less likely for it to intervene when the mainland seeks to take Taiwan back by forceful means.<sup>10</sup>

However, most Chinese observers seem to be convinced that a military solution to the Taiwan issue would most likely involve the United States.<sup>11</sup> Some forecast that a conflict with the United States over Taiwan is inevitable, or that a war in the Taiwan Strait would have to break out within ten years.<sup>12</sup> An important indication of a likely U.S. involvement in a future conflict is the effort made by some in U.S. Congress to pass the Taiwan Security Enhancement Act, which would make a firmer U.S. commitment to the defense of Taiwan. Continued American arms sales to Taiwan, certain items of advanced weaponry and technology in particular, have irritated Beijing. Chinese officials and policy analysts very often express the fear that such sales will encourage Taiwan’s separatist tendencies.

The Americans, especially many in U.S. Congress, are politically and ideologically sympathetic to what they see as a burgeoning democracy in Taiwan, in sharp contrast to a

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, such a description given by Li Shaojun, “Zhongmei guanxi yu Meiguo duihua zhengce de kunjing (China-U.S. relations and the dilemma in U.S. policy toward China),” *Guoji Jingji Pinglun* (International Economic Review), No. 3 (2000), p. 57. A similar conclusion is made by Pan Zhongqi, “Meiguo zai Taiwan wenti shang de liangnan qushe (A U.S. dilemma over the issue of Taiwan),” *Zhongguo Pinglun* (China Review), (November 2000), pp. 14-18.

<sup>9</sup> Wu Xinbo, “Shilun Zhongmei liangguo zai Taiwan wenti shang de gongshi (The China-U.S. consensus over the Taiwan issue),” *Taipingyang Xuebao* (Pacific Journal), No. 2 (2000), pp. 62-69.

<sup>10</sup> Zhai Xiaomin, “Zhongmei zhanlue guanxi fansi (A reflection of China-U.S. strategic relations)” *Zhanlue Yu Guanli* (Strategy and Management), No. 1 (2000), p. 36.

<sup>11</sup> See a discussion by China’s leading specialists on international affairs in “Zhongguo guojia anquan huanjing youwu ehua (Has the environment for China’s national security deteriorated),” *Zhongguo Pinglun* (China Review), No. 3 (2000), pp. 53-64.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

negative image of China's political system. The Americans are seen as having established a closer and more cordial relationship the Chen Shui-bian leadership than with Lee Teng-hui, his predecessor. This political prejudice adds one more element to the Chinese apprehension of U.S. attempts to "Westernize China and split China up," an official description of U.S. strategic goals in its China policy.

In the meantime, some Americans have made proposals for resumed cross-Strait dialogues. The Chinese receive such proposals with strong reservations and suspicions. First of all, the Taiwan issue is an internal affair of China in which other powers have no right to interfere. Second, given America's political sympathy to Taiwan and its strategic intentions as perceived in the PRC, such proposals are likely to serve the purpose of retarding the mainland's cause for reunification. Thirdly, Beijing has reaffirmed its position that any resumption of political talks with Taipei must be based on the One China Principle. Until and unless Taipei met this precondition unequivocally, Beijing would not take any such American proposals seriously.

The problem of Taiwan has already haunted U.S.-China relations for over a half century and will continue to do so for probably decades to come. While commercial, educational, and personal communications between the mainland and Taiwan are increasingly extensive, the island's identity as part of China is severely challenged by a variety of factors. As a result, the Taiwan issue, in both positive and negative aspects, is bound to loom larger on Beijing's policy agenda. This has already been evident in the mainland's media coverage of the Taiwan issue. In general, the Taiwan issue tends to dominate and exacerbate the PRC's anxiety about the enhancing influence of the United States in Asia.

### III. The U.S.-Japan Alliance

China has made it clear that it is opposed to the strengthening of the U.S.-Japan security alliance. Beijing argues that with the end of the Cold War no military alliance is needed, and that closer U.S.-Japan security ties have changed the strategic balance in East Asia to China's detriment. The Chinese also fear that the credibility of their deterrence to Taiwan independence might be reduced by joint U.S.-Japanese efforts. Moreover, the Beijing leadership is vigilant about any multilateral security arrangements in East Asia led by the United States.

Faced with an enhanced U.S.-Japan security relationship since 1996, many Chinese have expressed the expectation that the strategic imbalance would be redressed by an improved U.S.-China relationship.<sup>13</sup> In October 1997, Chinese President Jiang Zemin sent a meaningful

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Yang Jiemian, "Progress, Problems, and Trends," in Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE), ed., *New Dimensions of China-Japan-U.S. Relations* (Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange, 1999) pp. 27-28.

message in Honolulu by going personally to the Arizona National Memorial at Pearl Harbor, where he referred to the fact that “the Chinese and American peoples fought shoulder to shoulder against fascist aggression.”<sup>14</sup> When President Bill Clinton paid his highlighted state visit to China in the summer of 1998 without stopping over in Tokyo on his way, some Japanese felt the “Japan passing” phenomenon, suspecting that the United States was pursuing ties with China at the expense of the U.S.-Japan relationship.<sup>15</sup> The Chinese have surely noted the Japanese sentiment. As was observed by America’s China watchers, “Chinese leaders do (periodically) recognize that Japan probably would expand its armed forces if it had to unilaterally secure its own defense – this inclines Beijing to (sometimes) resonate to American claims that the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty permits Tokyo to keep its force level below what would be the case in the Treaty’s absence.”<sup>16</sup>

However, the recent development in the Japan-U.S. security relationship seems to have generated more apprehension rather than alleviation to the Chinese. One Chinese analyst stressed that the enhancement of the U.S.-Japan military alliance by expanding Japan’s surveillance area and involving Japan in the theater missile defense (TMD) system increased China’s distrust of Japan.<sup>17</sup> The Chinese certainly received the message that the Bush administration will tilt more toward Japan in its Asia policy orientation.<sup>18</sup>

A contrasting Chinese expectation, also regarding the U.S.-Japan alliance, has been a weakening of the alliance with the prospective improvement of the China-Japan relationship. Until the mid-1990s, it had been a widespread anticipation that the rising Japanese nationalism, inflamed by U.S.-Japan economic frictions and a possible “civilizational crash,” would lead to a Japanese foreign policy increasingly independent of the United States.<sup>19</sup> Japan was expected

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<sup>14</sup> “Toast by President Jiang Zemin at Luncheon Hosted by Mayor of Honolulu (26 October 1997),” in *Strive to Build a Constructive Strategic Partnership between China and the United States: State Visit by President Jiang Zemin of the People’s Republic of China to the United States of America* (Beijing: World Affairs Press, 1998), p. 91.

<sup>15</sup> Funabashi Yoichi, “Where does Japan fit in the China-Japan-U.S. relationship?”, in JCIE, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-81.

<sup>16</sup> James R. Schlesinger, et al., *Toward Strategic Understanding between America and China*, New York: National Committee on U.S.-China Relations China Policy Series, No. 13, December 1996, pp. 20-21.

<sup>17</sup> Guo Zhenyuan, “Guanyu Jianli Dongbeiya guoji xin zhixu wenti (on the establishment of a new international order in Northeast Asia)”, *Yafei Zongheng* (Asia and Africa Review), No. 4. (2000), p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Wang Jisi, “Ribei yinsu jiang riya tuxian (the Japan factor will be more salient),” *Huanqiu Shibao* (Global Times), January 5, 2001, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Xue Jundu and Lu Zhongwei, eds., *Mianxiang Ershiyi Shiji de Zhongguo Zhoubian Xingshi* (China and Her Neighbors: Prospects for the Twenty-First Century), (Beijing: Shishi Publishing House, 1995), pp. 287-296.

to move closer to China and other East Asian nations in economic, cultural, and political terms and eventually shake off its strategic bondage imposed by the United States.

Later events have proved, however, that the historical burden is too cumbersome, and the political cleavage between the two states too deep, for Japan to share more common strategic interests with China, especially when the United States regards China as its potential strategic rival and Japan as its political ally. On the part of China, the history of Japan's annexation of Taiwan after the 1894-1895 Sino-Japanese War, as well as the war crimes committed by the Japanese army during World War II, makes Chinese, leaders and citizens alike, deeply distrustful of Japanese intentions and sensitive to any signs of growing Japanese military power.

Moreover, observable Japanese sympathy with Taiwan around the current political difficulties across the Taiwan Strait gives rise to the Chinese suspicion that Japan may still retain some interest in this territory and may want to keep it away from Chinese sovereignty in order to prevent China from regaining its great power status in Asia. Some Chinese made the comment that the bottom line of Japan's attitude toward the Taiwan issue is the same as that of the United States, which is to obstruct China's national reunification. According to a Chinese commentator, Japan's commitment to the One China Principle is even less firm than the official U.S. position. The Japanese press gives a great deal of coverage to Lee Teng-hui's speeches calling for separation of Taiwan from the Chinese mainland, and Tokyo might provide an opportunity for the former Taiwanese leader to visit Japan, which would surely incur a strong protest from Beijing.<sup>20</sup>

The Chinese have strongly criticized the series of American and Japanese documents publicized in 1996-2000 that provides new guidelines for U.S.-Japan military cooperation. In reaction to the definition of "contingencies in Japan's peripheries" that would acquire joint U.S.-Japan military actions, the Chinese press points to the thinly concealed preparations of the two powers for countering conceivable Chinese attempts to reunify Taiwan by force. It is feared that Japan could be an "accomplice" of the United States if American forces intervened to thwart the PLA's offensive, although Japan might be cautious enough not to send its own combat units and limit its involvement to offering logistical support. In dealing with the Taiwan issue, Washington and Tokyo are seen to share a common long-term interest in limiting the growth of Chinese power.<sup>21</sup> The likelihood of a joint U.S.-Japan military intervention in regional

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<sup>20</sup> Chen Hongbin, "Ribei dui Tai zhengce de tese (the characteristics of Japan's policy toward Taiwan)," *Zhongguo Pinglun* (China Review), (August 2000), pp. 10-14.

<sup>21</sup> Lu Zhongwei, "Xin Zhizhen yiyu hewei (What's the purpose of the New Guidelines?)," *People's Daily*, April 30, 1999; Wang Gonglong, "Ribei dui Tai zhengce tiaozheng zhong de Meiguo yinsu (The America factor in the adjustment of Japan's policy toward Taiwan)," *Riben Xuekan* (Japanese Studies Journal), No. 6 (1999), pp. 32-43.

affairs has greatly increased after the two powers took steps to substantiate their defense coordination.<sup>22</sup>

Since the crisis in China-U.S. relations over the NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, there have been renewed efforts to mend Beijing's fences with Tokyo. The aforementioned debate about Chinese foreign policy has encompassed, among other issues, relations with Japan. The scope and depth of the discussions of Sino-Japanese relations have reflected much more than a tactical move caused by the Chinese indignation about the high-handed attitude of the United States toward China. A number of Chinese analysts have called for a comprehensive scrutiny of China's policy toward Japan. Admitting the existence of diversified Chinese views of Japan and Sino-Japanese relations, a leading commentator registered the hope that a more balanced and stable China-Japan-U.S. relationship would be made possible by a marked "breakthrough point" in developing a healthy Sino-Japanese relationship. He further commented that there is no other choice than establishing a friendly and good-neighborly relationship between China and Japan, and that such a relationship should resemble that between Germany and France in contemporary Europe.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the ups and downs of Sino-Japanese relations, the perception of Japan-U.S. security alliance as aimed at China, and the historical mistrust between the two Asian powers, it is highly unlikely that the strategic competition between China and Japan would soon assume a similar degree of intensify to which China and the United States are viewing each other in political and strategic dimensions. In other words, China will continue to see the United States as constituting the major threat to its national security, territorial integrity, and domestic political stability. For the last point, China's domestic stability might be undermined by the neo-interventionist tendency in U.S. policy toward Asia, which is reinforced by support from Japan and some Southeast Asian countries.<sup>24</sup>

#### IV. The Korean Peninsula

Korea is an important, if not the only, issue area in which China and the United States have more congruent than conflicting interests in the Asia Pacific region. The Korean Peninsula is at China's doorstep, with North Korea separated from China by small rivers and from South Korea by a strip of sea. The PRC has friendly diplomatic relations with both the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK). It is clearly

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<sup>22</sup> Fan Yuejiang, "Xin ganshe zhuyi yu Zhongguo anquan (Neo-interventionism and China's security)," *Taipingyang Xuebao* (Pacific Journal), No. 3 (2000), p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> Zhang Tuosheng, "Lishi de huigu yu qishi (The retrospect and lessons of history)," *Taipingyang Xuebao* (Pacific Journal), No. 3 (2000), p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> Fan Yuejiang, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

in China's interest to maintain peace and stability and keep the Korean Peninsula away from nuclear weapons and arms race. China has important commercial relations with South Korea, and is a vital trade partner for North Korea.

None of these Chinese interests contradicts any pronounced U.S. goal or interest in Northeast Asia. In reality, since the late 1980s the U.S. government has consistently expressed appreciation for China's role in maintaining stability on the Peninsula and in facilitating dialogues between Pyongyang and Washington. For example, Beijing supported an October 1996 UN Security Council statement expressing serious concerns about the intrusion of a DPRK submarine into ROK territory and reportedly rejected Pyongyang's claims that the 1953 armistice that ended the Korean War was no longer in force.<sup>25</sup> When tensions occurred between Pyongyang and Seoul in the 1990s, the Americans believed that there would be no assistance forthcoming from Beijing if North Korea were to attack the South. The PRC was also helpful by urging DPRK adherence to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and by urging Pyongyang to negotiate positive solutions to the issues of nuclear weapons materials and production facilities in the North. These are all cases often referred to by the Clinton administration in defending its policy of engagement with China when opponents of the policy charge that strategic cooperation between Washington and Beijing has had no positive result. There is no indication that Beijing has ever taken advantage of the DPRK's difficult relationship with the West to harm the United States.

More recently, both China and the United States have welcomed the Pyongyang-Seoul rapprochement that is paving the way for important economic and personnel exchanges between the two part of the same nation, though the Chinese leadership definitely has done more than their American counterpart in facilitating this reduction of tensions. In May 2000 and January 2001, Mr. Kim Jong Il, North Korea's paramount leader, paid two official visits to China, during which the Chinese were believed to have encouraged Pyongyang to further improve its relations with the West and shared with the guests their experiences of reform and opening to the outside world.

It can be inferred, therefore, that incompatibility of interests and goals between China and the United States over the Korean Peninsula must originate from beyond the Korean issue itself. One important reminder is that although in the post-Cold War era the Chinese have refrained from reprimanding directly the stationing of U.S. troops in South Korea, the Chinese official position remains opposed to America's military presence in Asia in principle.

One Chinese specialist argued that "with the reduction of tensions on the Korean Peninsula and the progress in seeking a peaceful solution to the Korean issue there should be less excuses for the United States to keep its military presence in Northeast Asia." As the

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<sup>25</sup> "China joins criticism of North Korea sub," *New York Times*, October 16, 1996.

strategic interest of the United States requires such military presence to be sustained, he foresaw no prospects for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea in the foreseeable future. This specialist further warned that Washington “would certainly look for other excuses or try to impede further relaxation of tensions on the Korean Peninsula,” thus complicating the efforts to establishing a new international order in Northeast Asia.<sup>26</sup> Another specialist worried about the possibility of shifting the focus of U.S. security concerns further to the Taiwan issue when the Korean situation continued to improve.<sup>27</sup>

As to America’s attitude toward Korean reunification, it is believed that the status quo of “no war, no reunification, not too warm, not too cold” serves U.S. strategic interests. American policy makers may want to prolong the separation in Korea and continue to depict North Korea as a threat so that they can justify the continuation of its military preponderance in Northeast Asia. According to some Chinese analyses, the Americans, in keeping the South scared by a Northern attack, will try to make the ROK continue to depend on U.S. forces on its territory. A North Korean “threat” will also serve the American plans for developing the missile defense system with Japan. In any case, the United States would not like to see genuine tranquility on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>28</sup>

## V. Arms Control

To China, the most pivotal arms control issues in East Asia are certainly neither North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs nor China’s procurement of advanced weaponry. Beijing is most gravely concerned with America’s arms sales to Taiwan, which has been discussed above, and U.S. plans to develop and deploy the Theater Missile Defense (TMD) system and the related National Missile Defense (NMD) system.

China’s strategic analysts pay a great deal of attention to what they suspect as a redirection of U.S. strategic focus from Europe to Asia.<sup>29</sup> They have also noticed that it does not seem practical to expect the United States under the Bush administration to forsake the NMD and TMD programs despite the postponement announced by President Bill Clinton in 2000 when his government was faced with technical obstacles and oppositions about the programs in Asia and Europe. Also, the missile programs are boosted by a strong U.S. economy

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<sup>26</sup> Guo Zhenyuan, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Wang Jisi, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Gong Keyu, “Bandaο xieyang xia de xingtiaoqi (The future of U.S. forces on the Korean Peninsula after the Korean summit meeting),” *Guoji Zhanwang* (World Outlook), (November 2000), pp.22-25.

<sup>29</sup> For a recent discussion of U.S. global strategy, see Yang Jiemian, “Kua shiji shijie geju zhong de Meiguo quanqiu zhanlue (U.S. global strategy in the world structure at the turn of the century),” *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* (International Studies), No. 6 (2000), pp. 23-30.

and pushed by the interest of the “military-industrial complex” in the United States.

In the eyes of some Chinese, TMD has become the most important security issue in Northeast Asia and one of the major sources of China-U.S. rivalry.<sup>30</sup> They reject the notion that TMD is to be just a “defensive weapon system,” contending that it could serve offensive purposes if it were used to protect the forces launching an attack. The main reason for China not to develop its own TMD is the lack of economic and technological resources to do so. However, Japan, and to a lesser extent Taiwan, are interested in obtaining TMD because both of them may afford the financial cost and feel the strategic need to assist the United States in these projects. The fact that the United States may be willing to share TMD technologies with Japan and Taiwan reminds China that it might be threatened by a quasi-alignment against it in East Asia led by the United States.

Several reasons have been listed as to why China is so strongly against TMD. First, the research and development of TMD will internalize the existing mutual suspicions between the United States and China. China suspects that TMD is aimed at China, and the United States suspects that China’s opposition to TMD is based on its ambition to challenge American strategic positions. Second, since Chinese missiles are seen as the most credible deterrence to Taiwan’s secession from China, Taiwanese obtaining of such a weapon system might neutralize the PRC’s deterrence and encourage pro-independence elements in Taiwan. Third, the TMD program might sow the seeds of mistrust between Japan and China and give impetus to the increase of Japan’s defense budget, which in turn would force China to seek countermeasures. Fourth, the TMD program might stimulate an arms race in East Asia. Finally, TMD may contribute more to the difficulties for nonproliferation of weapons of massive destruction in the region, discouraging China from entering the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) that it showed an interest in joining.<sup>31</sup>

Some other Chinese comments have focused on the possible detriment to global and regional security done by the NMD program. They refer to the negative impact of NMD on the implement of the anti-ballistic missile treaty (ABM) signed by the United States and the Soviet Union in 1972.<sup>32</sup> At present, both China and Russia have emphasized their common ground and coordination in opposing NMD. In the meantime, Chinese arms control specialists are watching closely what is going on between the United States and Russia on this issue, particularly whether Russia would make a compromise by agreeing to some kind of revision

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<sup>30</sup> Yan Xuetong, “Zhanqu daodan fangyu xitong yu Dongbeiya anquan (TMD and Northeast Asian security),” *Guoji Jingji Pinglun* (International Economic Review), No. 7-8 (2000), p. 59.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63; Xia Liping, “Meiguo fazhan daodan fuyu xitong jiqi dui Yatai anquan de yingxiang (The U.S. development of missile defense system and its impact on security in Asia Pacific),” *Guoji GuanCha* (International Survey), No. 5 (2000), pp. 13-15.

<sup>32</sup> Xia Liping, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-17.

of ABM and allowing limited development of NMD. It was noted that the possibility of such a compromise does exist owing to Russia's current disability and unwillingness to be engaged in an arms race with the United States.<sup>33</sup> However, there has been no indication that China would soften its attitude toward the TMD and NMD issues with the United States as these missile development programs would be very harmful to its strategic interests.

## VI. Conclusion

The PRC's view about how to construct a new security order in East Asia is heavily contingent upon its relationships with the United States and Japan. Two determinants stand out in shaping the Chinese position. The first is China's domestic political agenda. As long as Beijing concentrates on the sustaining of economic growth as its central task, there is no reason why the current foreign policy orientation should change. China's diplomacy must be conducted to provide a viable and peaceful international environment for its economic development and social welfare at home. Beijing's determination and strenuous efforts to join WTO will ensure that China will seek benefits from the existing international economic order. As market forces grow increasingly stronger in this country, political reform will come to the fore. Meanwhile, the PRC will continue to see the United States with ambivalent feelings, resisting its political pressure and ideological influences on the one hand but welcoming its trade, investment, technological transfer, and managerial skills on the other. To the PRC, the concept of national security and international security is based most importantly on its political stability at home.

The second determinant is the Taiwan issue. China's concerns about U.S. security alliances and military presence in the region, as well as its objection to America's ballistic missile defense system, all have their root causes in its consideration about Taiwan. Beijing will continue to be patient in making overtures to Taipei for peaceful reunification while improving its military capabilities in case it has to use force to suppress Taiwan independence. Any new international security arrangements in the region have to take China's interests and concerns seriously, whereas China is also increasingly aware of the interests and concerns of its neighbors.

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<sup>33</sup> Fan Jishe, "Lengzhan hou Mei-E zai fandao tiaoyue wenti shang de douzheng yu tuoxie (The conflict and compromise between the U.S. and Russia around ABM Treaty)," *Taipingyang Xuebao* (Pacific Journal), No. 3 (2000), pp. 34-45.