

Action Center/Center for Economic and Social Rights v. Nigeria), Case No. ACHPR/COMM/A044/1. <<http://www.umn.edu/humanrts/africa/comcases/allcases.html>>.

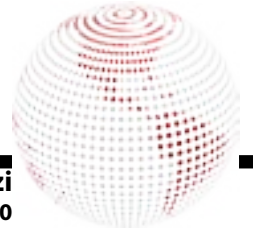
- 11 Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index ranks Nigeria 121<sup>st</sup> out of 180 countries, with a score of 2.7 out of 10, while its citizens hold a confidence range of only 2.3 to 3.0 out of 10 in the government. See: Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2008. Transparency International, 2008. <[http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi)>.
- 12 Campbell, Kelly, "Bringing Peace to the Niger Delta." Bringing Peace to the Niger Delta. United States Institute of Peace, June 2008. <<http://www.usip.org/resources/bringing-peace-niger-delta>>.
- 13 Smock, David R, "Crisis in the Niger Delta." Crisis in the Niger Delta. United States Institute of Peace, Sep. 2009. <<http://www.usip.org/resources/crisis-in-the-niger-delta>>.
- 14 "The Ogomudia Report: Report of the Special Security Committee on Oil Producing Areas." 1. <http://www.adakaboro.org/resources/resources/articles/76-theogomudiarep>.
- 15 Ibid, 17.
- 16 Gore, Charles, and David Pratten. "The Politics of Plunder: The Rhetorics of Order and Disorder in Southern Nigeria." African Affairs 102 (2003): 211-40. 212.
- 17 While at times "ambiguous" and "incoherent," President Yar'Adua's efforts in the Delta included the creation of the Niger Delta Technical Committee in 2008, the establishment of the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs in 2008, and a scheme to organize militants into a private company charged with guarding oil facilities. See: "Nigeria: Seizing the Moment in the Niger Delta." International Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°60, 30 April 2009.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Connors, Will. "Bombings in Nigeria Imperil Amnesty." The Wall Street Journal, 16 March 2010. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703909804575123170757234164.html>.
- 20 Here, the "sides" are the government and the communal groups.
- 21 "Nigeria: Seizing the Moment in the Niger Delta." International Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°60, 30 April 2009.
- 22 Amnesty International. "Amnesty International Report 2009 – Nigeria." Amnesty International, 28 May 2009. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4a1fadcf2.html>.
- 23 Idemudia, Uwafokun, and Uwern E. Ite. "Demystifying the Niger Delta Conflict: Towards an Integrated Explanation." Review of African Political Economy 33.109 (2006): 391-406.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Gore, Charles, and David Pratten. "The Politics of Plunder: The Rhetorics of Order and Disorder in Southern Nigeria." African Affairs 102 (2003): 211-40. 240.
- 26 "The Swamps of Insurgency: Nigeria's Delta Unrest." Crisis Group Africa Report 115, 3 Aug. 2006, 12. <http://www.adakaboro.org/ndmiscreports>.
- 27 For an overview of the development initiatives and programs of Royal Dutch Shell, ExxonMobil, Chevron, Agip, Topcon and PIMCO during the 1990s, see: Maj. Gen. Popoola's Report of the Committee on the Development Options for the Niger-Delta <http://www.adakaboro.org/popoolarep1999>; For a critique of corporate development projects, see: Frynas, Jędrzej George. "Corporate and State Responses to Anti-Oil Protests in the Niger Delta." African Affairs 100 (2001): 27-54.
- 28 Frynas, Jędrzej George. "Corporate and State Responses to Anti-Oil Protests in the Niger Delta." African Affairs 100 (2001): 27-54. 47.
- 29 Ikelegbe, Augustine. "Civil Society, Oil and Conflict in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: Ramifications of Civil Society for a Regional Resource Struggle." Journal of Modern African Studies 39.3 (2001): 437-69. 439-40.
- 30 Ibid, 462.
- 31 For an excellent overview of civil society groups in the Niger Delta region, including specific groups, objectives, actions taken, leadership, ethnic/state base and period of activism, see: Ikelegbe, Augustine. "Civil Society, Oil and Conflict in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: Ramifications of Civil Society for a Regional Resource Struggle." Journal of Modern African Studies 39.3 (2001): 437-69.
- 32 Gore, Charles, and David Pratten. "The Politics of Plunder: The Rhetorics of Order and Disorder in Southern Nigeria." African Affairs 102 (2003): 211-40. 220.
- 33 Awe, Bolanle. "Conflict and Divergence: Government and Society in Nigeria." African Studies Review 12.3 (1999): 1-20.
- 34 Smock, David R, "Crisis in the Niger Delta." Crisis in the Niger Delta. United States Institute of Peace, Sep. 2009. <http://www.usip.org/resources/crisis-in-the-niger-delta>.
- 35 Awe, Bolanle. "Conflict and Divergence: Government and Society in Nigeria." African Studies Review 12.3 (1999): 1-20.

Photos courtesy of:

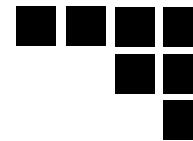
Bobo's Along the River. Niger.JPG."Wikimedia Commons. Web. 13 Nov. 2010. <[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3e/Bobo's\\_along\\_the\\_river\\_the\\_Niger.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3e/Bobo's_along_the_river_the_Niger.jpg)>

Nigerien MNJ Fighter Technical Gun.JPG."Wikimedia Commons. Web. 13 Nov. 2010. <[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nigerien\\_MNJ\\_fighter\\_technical\\_gun.JPG](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nigerien_MNJ_fighter_technical_gun.JPG)>

## The Same Bed: Articulating a Continuity Thesis in US-China Policy



Emmanuel Rizzi  
Cornell University, Class of 2010



*This analysis of U.S.-China relations was motivated by what I perceived to be misplaced "controversy" over Obama's China visit in autumn 2009 and his subsequent policy initiatives, which despite all of the public scorn are really no different from those of previous administrations. The paper singles out a rarely-articulated coherent logic in the history of U.S. foreign policy towards China, one that I argue can also predict U.S. policy in the present and future.*

### Introduction

In a controversial and popularly cited 1999 *Foreign Affairs* article, Gerald Segal posed the question "Does China matter?" in response to growing international attention regarding China's economic miracle over the preceding decade. Segal's answer, "the Middle Kingdom is a middle power - China matters far less than it and most of the West think, and it is high time the West began treating it as such"<sup>1</sup> resonates considerably less today; since then, both China and opinion regarding it have advanced significantly, giving rise to new fears and perceptions of U.S. foreign policy. In 2007, the *Financial Times* boldly suggested that "the era of American global dominance is coming to a close" and may be overtaken by China in about twenty years.<sup>2</sup> Alarm over conciliatory policies in this newly perceived context is commonplace and unsurprising, as exemplified by the sharp criticism of Obama's China policy in the wake of his state visit to Beijing last month. His critics in Congress, non-governmental organizations and the general public bemoan that a hard line on China, rather than the open-handed approach of the Obama presidency and his compromising character, would fashion a tougher and ultimately safer stance on China for national security and prosperity.

However, this common narrative belies the complex realities of the Sino-American relationship. It unfortunately makes

up in popular appeal, by indulging in a public fearful of its national decline, what it lacks in a sound understanding of past and present U.S. political relations with China and the Far East. Despite journalistic and scholarly claims to the contrary over the years, current U.S. foreign policy regarding China follows in a long pedigree of bilateral relations that have, over the last two decades especially, formed and severely constrained the range of policy options available in the present day. The realities and complexities of this relationship effectively limit the influence that any one ideology or personality in power may have. In spite of the rhetoric of U.S. leaders and the much-publicised occasional "crises" that have marked the tumultuous nature of Sino-American diplomacy, this study argues that U.S. foreign policy towards China has not only exhibited remarkable continuity since and during the Cold War, but will continue to be unremarkably predictable in coming years. Rather, the perceived multiplicity of policy options is a misperception arising from the traditional and systemic conflict between Congress and the Executive over China policy.

### US-China Bilateral Relations: The Traditional Macro-History

In traditional terms, the story of U.S. foreign policy towards the People's Republic of China (PRC) is divided into two distinct periods – the Cold War and the period since the Cold

War – with the latter exhibiting constant shifts in policy orientation both between and within presidential administrations.

The détente with China orchestrated by Nixon and Kissinger in the 1972 Shanghai Communiqué opened nearly two decades of bilateral relations based on mutual strategic imperatives under a Cold War setting. By that time, after the discovery of Soviet troops in Cuba and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, U.S. – Soviet détente had ended and Washington was ever less sanguine about it reemerging. As the Soviet Union came to appear more ominous, China grew more valuable to the United States as a strategic ally. “It was clear,” notes Robert S. Ross, “that the United States now sought a ‘stable marriage’ so as to better contend with Soviet U.S. policy.”<sup>3</sup> During this time, the U.S. and China cooperated strategically against their common enemy, and refrained from quarrelling over Taiwan as a result. The issue of human rights was likewise intertwined with strategic objectives, agrees Ming Wan, a Chinese historian: “Human rights in China was rarely mentioned by the government, the media or human rights NGOs in the United States throughout the 1970s and only incrementally in the 1980s...China was a ‘human rights exception’ even when the United States pursued an articulated global human rights policy.”<sup>4</sup>

From the perspective of U.S. foreign policy, the evidence amply supports this characterisation. China became increasingly opposed to U.S. arms sales to Taiwan after 1979 and instigated a round of negotiations that, as a characteristic and high-profile example, does well to reveal the nature of the U.S.-China relationship at the opening of the 1980s. When Washington attempted to moderate Beijing’s stand by balancing arms sales to Taiwan with arms sales to the PRC, Chinese leaders refused to buy U.S. arms and threatened further hostile action.<sup>5</sup> The resulting 1982 Communiqué was a result of aggressive Chinese negotiation; although it did not promulgate a specific end to arms sales, it did bring China much closer to

its ultimate goal by placing heavy restrictions on Washington’s arms policy. “The negotiating process,” observes Ross, “revealed... Washington’s fear that China would carry out its threat, thereby undermining the strategic relationship with China.”<sup>6</sup> It was very much in Washington’s interest, both at the outset of China’s “opening” and towards the end of the Cold War, to play down the importance of the contentions including Taiwan and human rights, and push for Sino-American cooperation.

But since the end of the Cold War, Sino-American relations have operated within a drastically altered international context requiring an equally distinct bilateral relationship. In the pivotal year of 1989, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the brutal suppression of the Tiananmen protests dealt a dual blow to the U.S.-China rapport within the United States. Throughout the Cold War, the Chinese had stood, for America, at the forefront of reform in the communist world – “daring, innovative, and increasingly capitalist.”<sup>7</sup> That it now stood at the turn of the decade as a lingering bastion of communism seen anew as corrupt and backwards in the wake of the Tiananmen massacre led to a profound disillusionment as the public turned away from China.<sup>8</sup> The uneasy relationship in the early 1990s was accordingly characterised by Chinese distrust and American toughness, with central disputes over the trade imbalance, nuclear proliferation, and human rights.

The conventional view, which is certainly validated to a significant extent, is that the United States found itself freed from self-restraint to criticise China over issues and controversies it had hitherto quelled. American grievances focussed on the huge US trade deficit as a result of the impenetrability of the Chinese market, its intellectual property infringements and deceptive foreign labelling, as well as the PRC’s sales of ballistic missiles to Syria, Pakistan and Iran. Criticism was most forceful in the aftermath of the Tiananmen

protests in regards to religious tolerance in Tibet, as well as the upcoming transfer of Hong Kong to the PRC. China, on the other hand, insisted on the sovereignty of its nation with respect to internal matters, and argued the hypocrisy of U.S. criticism in regards to its arms policies, as the U.S. remained the world’s largest arms merchant.

Of course, there were important agreements and compromises between the two countries during this time. Most famously, U.S. President Bill Clinton decided to “delink” the renewal of China’s Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status from human rights, as part of his administration’s mid-term adoption of the “Comprehensive Engagement” policy. Towards the end of his term, U.S. President Bill Clinton also initiated the negotiations that would shortly thereafter lead to China’s lauded accession to the World Trade Organisation. These “engagement” accomplishments and concessions towards the PRC, however, remain in the shadow of the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, as well as the initial hard-line policy that Clinton campaigned under with regards to confronting China.

Despite the advancement of the bilateral relationship, encyclopaedic accounts (which are useful for their professional impartiality and macro-positioning) of the 1990s U.S.-China relationship relegate them with respect to the squabbles and altercations that defined the uneasiness of the decade. “In the absence of the strategic imperative that the Cold War had supplied, such disagreements loomed larger and could not be resolved with the ambiguous compromises of earlier years;”<sup>9</sup> the Encyclopedia of U.S. Foreign Relations points out in its entry on China. The picture of U.S. China policy in the decade following the Cold War thus becomes one of no recognisable pattern, alternating between containment and engagement, censure and praise, toughness and compromise, and even armed confrontation and peace. As a result of the tumultuous highs and lows of U.S. foreign policy towards China in the 1990s,

the dominant appraisal becomes one of uncertainty. Indeed, for its closing statement, the encyclopaedia asserts that “as the end of the twentieth century approached, Sino-American relations once again only could be characterized as troubled and uncertain, weaker than at any time since rapprochement began.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Confronting and Refining the Traditional Narrative**

This is not a mistaken narrative; it is a simplistic one. It serves as a useful base from which to understand the evolution of U.S. foreign policy and the various approaches that have been tried by the George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush presidencies since the end of the Cold War. Indeed, this paper neither refutes this account of the history of American China policy nor asserts that the current administration views it as such. However, it does contend that to take it for granted, as is often the case during foreign policy debate in the U.S., will inevitably lead to a misperception of current policy and perhaps influence the pursuit of unsound policy (or, as seems to be the case, undue critique of sound policy).

The problem arises from the framing of the post-Cold War relationship as one in which the United States could finally pursue a policy guided by the full scope of its national interest. In this sense, it tends to see negotiation with China not as part of a pattern of rational strategy implementation, but rather as periodic concessions eroding what would otherwise promote U.S. interests more fully. However, beneath much of the rhetoric and public policy debates, U.S. presidents since the Cold War have rarely acted as suggested by their aggressive policy outlines. Patient and calculated negotiation with the PRC has, in fact, been the norm.

Consider the actual policies of the last three presidencies. Although both Clinton and Bush campaigned under a tough China policy, both presidents quickly found

it necessary to conduct an abrupt about-face in policy as a result of the realities of the bilateral relationship. George H. W. Bush, for his part, although inaugurated during the Cold War, continued to be relatively accommodating towards China past 1989. During his presidency he maintained his support for unconditional MFN status and favoured a policy of engagement with China. Perhaps most relevantly, he tempered the U.S. government's censure and sanctions following the Tiananmen massacre by secretly dispatching the emissaries Brent Scowcroft and Lawrence Eagleburger to China in order to assure the PRC that the U.S. was still keenly interested in maintaining good relations. Unsurprisingly, the eventual discovery of the mission led to a public uproar; in doing so, however, Bush continued in the tradition of his Cold War predecessors and set the precedent for overall warm relations with China in the post-Cold War period.

### Clinton

President Bill Clinton campaigned for his presidency under a decidedly aggressive China policy, in fact placing himself in direct opposition to Bush. In 1992, Clinton condemned his predecessor's China policy as too soft and vowed to get tough with China if elected to the White House. One year later, he announced his momentous decision to issue an ultimatum for the PRC to change its human rights practise in 12 months or face suspension of its MFN status.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, in 1994, Clinton reversed course, preaching instead a revised policy of "comprehensive engagement", to the bafflement and suspicion of both American and Chinese onlookers. Nevertheless, he appeared committed throughout the rest of his presidency to the new policy. Chinese President Jiang Zemin soon visited the White house for the first time in Clinton's presidency, and the U.S. president reciprocated by touring China in 1998. Notable negotiations of Clinton's China policy include drawing the

terms for China's admission to the WTO, even while the administration wanted to reduce the nation's trade deficit with China. He likewise issued permanent normal trade relation status to the PRC. As previously mentioned, these advancements accompanied Clinton's



Presidents Jiang Zemin of China and Bill Clinton of the U.S. on September 11, 1999.

abandonment of the annual renewal of China's MFN status as a contingency of China's human rights record, which had been a strong coercive incentive for reform within the PRC. Although economists and businesses were pleased, the policy infuriated a portion of the U.S. public, Congress, and activist organisations.

The 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, which escalated dangerously to a show of arms between the two powers after the U.S. granted then-Taiwanese President Lee Teng-Hui an entry visa, stands as the most confrontational moment in Sino-Soviet relations since the Cold War. Notably, the conflict occurred over Taiwan, where U.S. leaders have traditionally been most aggressive. Even more important, however, is the response that the crisis elicited from Clinton's administration. Although Ross makes clear that Clinton's bold move to "allow Taiwan's most senior leader to enter the United States reversed more than twenty-five years of U.S. diplomatic precedent,"<sup>12</sup> the president's subsequent actions convey an urgent desire to mend relations, much as President Bush had displayed in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square protests. During a tour in China in 1998, Clinton not only coined

China a "strategic partner", but also stated the "Three No's" to Taiwan: that America would not support Taiwanese independence, two Chinas, or Taiwanese membership in the United Nations. Moreover, it appears that all subsequent Taiwanese presidents have been only been issued visas for layovers as they are passing through the United States on their way to Latin America.<sup>13</sup>

Nearly all of Clinton's policy enactments under his engagement strategy, largely regarded today as fundamental progress in bilateral relations and China's constructive emergence, elicited controversy at the time. To downplay the criticism he received by hard-liners who felt betrayed by his change of strategy, Clinton's rhetoric stressed the generally prevailing notion that increased economic integration and interdependency would eventually lead to demands for political reform within China.

### Bush

President George W. Bush assumed office in the same manner as Clinton eight years earlier. Regarding Chinese expansionary interests as a threat to U.S. hegemony, he negated the unifying effects of Clinton's words during his 1998 China tour by stating that China was not America's strategic partner, but instead a "strategic competitor." As Andrei Davydov broadly summarises, "Vice President Cheney, Defense Minister Donald Rumsfeld, and their departments believed that a policy, if not of deterrence, at least of active constraint should be carried out regarding China, which presumed expanding America's military presence in Asia, increasing political and military assistance to Taiwan, strengthening political relations with countries allied and friendly with the U.S., and treating China as a potential strategic adversary."<sup>14</sup> In line with this reorientation in foreign policy, the president's harshest statement was delivered on 25 April during an impromptu interview on ABC's Good Morning America, where he affirmed for the first time in U.S. history that

if Taiwan were attacked, the U.S. would do "whatever it took"<sup>15</sup> to defend the island. In so doing, the president was effectively declaring that the U.S. was abandoning the "indeterminate strategy"<sup>16</sup> it had pursued for decades regarding a possible attack on Taiwan. Bush retracted his statement later that afternoon during an interview with CNN, subtly returning to the status quo position of Clinton's presidency. The message to the PRC, however, remained unsettling. The Bush administration complemented its aggressive military tone with various diplomatic affronts, including an invitation to the Dalai Lama.

Chi Wang, author of *George W. Bush and China*, reveals that "apart from being confrontational, Bush's China policy also appeared contradictory" – for instance, by announcing major shifts in China policy only to retract the statements, on several occasions.<sup>17</sup> The contradictory nature of President Bush's foreign policy serves to underscore the naivety of a new administration as yet unfamiliar with the history of the bilateral relationship. As Wang makes clear in her investigative work, ***Vice President Cheney, Defense Minister Donald Rumsfeld and their departments believed that a policy...at least of active constraint, should be carried out regarding China, which presumed...treating China as a potential strategic adversary.***

one explanation is that the Bush administration contained "no senior-level officials with any significant amount of China experience."<sup>18</sup> Although it is difficult to tell at what point in the Bush presidency the administration would have softened its tone towards the PRC, the terrorist attacks of September eleventh, 2001 provided a premature impetus for a complete reorientation of China policy.

Recognising the need for China's cooperation in combating international

terrorism and the nuclear threat in North Korea, the Bush administration rapidly resumed a cooperative tone and frequent visits in order to emphasise the two nations' common ground. The resulting China policy over the ensuing seven years followed, as a result, from this sentiment and from prior administrations' approach. Proposing a "constructive, cooperative, and candid"<sup>19</sup> relationship with the PRC, Bush made an unprecedented two visits to China within a half-year after September 11, 2001. A third summit meeting took place at the Bush family ranch in Texas in 2002, signifying the highest frequency of meetings between the top leaders of the U.S. and China in history.<sup>20</sup> In June 2004, the White House pressured the Pentagon to cancel Major-General John Allen's visit to Taiwan. That December, as Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao was visiting the U.S., Bush issued a statement about Taiwan's ambitions for independence by saying, "The comment and actions made by the leader of Taiwan indicate that he may be willing to make decisions unilaterally to change the status quo, which we oppose."<sup>21</sup> Regarding the issue, Wang writes that "while the previous U.S. administration had very deliberately taken no position on the matter of sovereignty over Taiwan, Dennis Wilder, a senior Bush aide, said during his trip with the president to the April 2007 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit that 'Membership in the United Nations requires statehood. Taiwan is not at this point a state in the international community.'"<sup>22</sup>

While making these concessions, the Bush administration simultaneously continued the Clinton initiative to bolster its forces in the Pacific, particularly in order to respond quickly to any threat made on Taiwan. Besides expanding the number of aircraft carriers, battleships, and missile submarines in the Western Pacific, the Bush administration also fostered closer military ties with Taiwan by facilitating communication and training. Such military preparedness in the region is vital to Washington's interests, as it had been

under the last two administrations.

The China policy of President Bush, then, despite its initial confrontational stance and aggressive tone, followed from that of Presidents Clinton and his father before him. Cooperation and engagement with the PRC was seen as a vital diplomatic necessity, all the while ensuring the independence of Taiwan from an undue Chinese attack.

### **Whence the Misperception? US Congress, the Executive, and China Policy**

In his influential 2000 work *Same Bed, Different Dreams*, David M. Lampton asserts that "one key to the productive management of the relationship between the United States and China is effective and secure political leadership in both nations. To that end, individuals are of enormous consequence."<sup>23</sup> If that were the case, however, the different priorities, ideologies, and personalities of all recent U.S. presidents would have yielded foreign policies distinct from one another in ways that the actual evidence does not support, and in fact actively contradicts. Writing at the end of George W. Bush's term – and with the advantage of 8 years' hindsight not afforded Lampton – Wang supported this view: "While the composition of the Bush administration's second-term cabinet combines continuity with change, those with backgrounds in Sino-U.S. relations and those without, and strong, controversial public figures with relative unknowns, the China-U.S. relationship does not seem so different from what it was by the end of the Clinton administration"<sup>24</sup> Indeed, despite the significant disparities among the three presidencies, their generally unanimous adoption of strategic partnership with respect to the PRC signals that other, systemic and entrenched forces are at work.

What, then, may explain the vehement and often controversial policy debate within the U.S. government and the wide range of discussion regarding China policy when the outcome is generally predictable? What

factors continue to mischaracterise U.S. China policy as a "rollercoaster,"<sup>25</sup> and cause indignation over supposed "concessions"? Perhaps the most viable explanation for the dearth of an established continuity theory finds expression in the traditionally antagonistic positions of Congress and the Executive in forming China policy. Particularly illustrative of this dynamic are the differences in opinion between the two branches during George W. Bush's rapprochement with the PRC following his initially hostile relationship. While the Executive's priority was to highlight the importance of cooperation with the PRC, Congress was awash in bills proposed to counter one threat or another posed by the PRC; according to *The Economist* of April 7, 2007, almost a dozen anti-China bills had already been introduced in the U.S. Congress since the beginning of that year. Washington and Beijing engaged in tit-for-tat bans on imports of foodstuffs and other goods. Newspapers and policy journals were saturated with articles predicting a serious crisis in bilateral relations. China's rising influence in Asia, its rapid program of military modernization, its aggressive search for secure energy supplies, its periodic saber-rattling toward Taiwan, and its refusal, or inability, to clarify ultimate intentions encouraged understandable fears about the security of American interests.<sup>26</sup>

Although Vice President Dick Cheney eventually "took up the theme previously articulated"<sup>27</sup> questioning the motives behind China's growing military reach at the time and thus played a role in fuelling anti-Chinese sentiment, the difference in intensity between Executive and Congressional condemnation is striking.

Indeed, as Hathaway notes, veteran Washington Asia-watcher Chris Nelson has observed that "every president since the 1970s has had a dual China problem: managing ties with Beijing while simultaneously countering congressional calls for a tougher policy toward the PRC."<sup>28</sup> The reason for such a surprising ideological cleavage between the two

branches, Hathaway proposes, is that China policy does not divide along either partisan or ideological lines. Because one party in the American two-party system is always "out", "that party can usually be counted upon to be pushing for a harder line on China."<sup>29</sup>

This dynamic, however, is as old as U.S.-PRC relations themselves. When the Carter

***Despite the significant disparities among the three presidencies, their generally unanimous adoption of strategic partnership with respect to the PRC signals that other, systemic and entrenched forces are at work.***

White House transferred recognition of China from Taipei to Beijing, Congress "balked."<sup>30</sup> In response, it passed the Taiwan Relations Act – affirming and obliging U.S. preparedness to defend the national security of Taiwan. Lee Teng-Hui's conflict-ridden visit to the United States was the result of Congressional granting of a visa, to which Clinton eventually (and surprisingly) agreed. In fact, the decision "challenged Clinton administration public policy statements and private reassurances to Chinese leaders that such a visit was contrary to U.S. policy toward Taiwan."<sup>31</sup> In yet another instance, immediately before Clinton's visit to China during which he professed the Three No's in concession to Beijing, the Senate voted 92 to 0 and the House 411 to 0 in resolutions intended to remind the president of the Taiwan Relations Act.<sup>32</sup>

Other explanations could include the powerful influence of special interest groups – for instance, Hollywood pushing for copyright infringement legislation, or North Carolina textile workers demanding a halt to cheap Chinese imports. Their influence comes from the considerable ability of such interest groups to wield power within the American political system in comparison to other nations. Furthermore, this paper posits

a last reason for the perceived volatility in U.S. foreign policy regarding China; that of a marked lack of historical awareness on the part of American legislators and incoming presidents in regards to the complexities of Sino-American bilateral relations. Inherent in this study is the hope that in understanding the history of engagement with the PRC, U.S. foreign policy will stand to gain from reduced opposition and increased soundness of policy prescriptions.

## Conclusion

This study seeks to firmly establish a continuity theory in regards to U.S. foreign policy towards China that can tie together the policies of the last four U.S. presidents as the continuation of a single actual policy. In an even grander and innovative<sup>33</sup> scope, it strives toward an equally sustained continuity in this policy of engagement stretching back to Nixon's and Kissinger's opening of diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1972. Instances such as Reagan's granting of political asylum to the



Though administrations have changed, Sino-American policy has remained constant.

Chinese tennis player Hu Na in 1983<sup>34</sup> (before the resumption of annual summits with the Soviet Union in 1985 signalled a lessening dependence on Beijing); as well as the 1982 joint communiqué pledging the U.S. not to exceed the 1979 amount<sup>35</sup> of military aid to Taiwan<sup>36</sup>; up to and including George H. W. Bush's 1989 secret dispatching of diplomats to Beijing in the Tiananmen aftermath, establish

a credible record of engagement with the PRC during the Cold War.

Such a historical record matters in policy debate because it has a great effect on actual diplomacy crafted and pursued by incumbent presidential administrations. In his initial articulation of China policy upon entering office, Obama does indeed present a shift in policy with regards to the last two presidents. However, as should be clear by now, this shift signals little else than a bit more honesty on the part of an incoming president. Sharp criticism in the wake of Obama's first expressions of his policy following his visit to China—even in sophisticated discourse—unfortunately reflects a traditional understanding of the bilateral relationship with the Cold War that falls short of explaining the full scope of Sino-American relations and, especially, its U.S. policy. *The New York Times* reports that “in the United States, Obama's coining of the phrase ‘strategic reassurance’ has been attacked by conservative commentators, who argue that any reassurance that the United States provides to China would be an acknowledgment of a decline in American power.”<sup>37</sup> Moreover, in an op-ed article in *The Washington Post*, the analysts Robert Kagan and Dan Blumenthal argued that the policy had echoes of Europe “ceding the Western Hemisphere to American hegemony”<sup>38</sup> a century ago. “Lingering behind this concept is an assumption of America's inevitable decline,” they wrote.

As the policies of George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George H. W. Bush make exceedingly clear, the sort of engagement and negotiations being pursued by Obama are not only not new; they are sound from the perspective of U.S. presidential administrations for well over two decades and will continue to set the tradition for the bilateral relationship in the future. While the U.S. will remain highly critical of China's human rights abuses and be militarily ready for a conflict over Taiwan, it will mute its harshest language and actions in order to ensure a peaceful coexistence between

the two and an avoidance of conflict in the Far East that, as far into the future as we can see, is mutually regarded as a sort of renewed concept of “mutually assured destruction.” In stark contrast to the Soviet Union of the 1950s and 1960s, however, China faces not just the U.S.; it faces a Western-centred system that is open, integrated, and rule-based, with wide and deep political foundations.

As Wang revealingly points out, on the eve of the 2004 U.S. presidential election, “Yan Xuetong, director of Tsinghua University's

Institute for International Studies, commented that ‘whoever wins the election, there's no need to worry because they will adopt the same policy, especially on the Taiwan issue... If there is some change, it will be superficial.’<sup>39</sup> Much the same could be said of the 2008 campaign, the 2012 campaign, and the following two or three. Beyond that, an emerged China may very well be playing a diplomatic game different from the one it has hitherto pursued, which will require a different set of diplomatic responses from the United States.

## Endnotes

- 1 Gerald Segal, “Does China Matter?,” *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 5 (1999)
- 2 Gideon Rachman, “Will China Really Overtake America?,” *The Financial Times*, June 11, 2007
- 3 Robert S. Ross, *Chinese Security Policy: Structure, Power and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 192
- 4 Ming Wan, “Human Rights and Sino-US Relations: Policies and Changing Realities,” *The Pacific Review* 10, No. 2 (1997): 237
- 5 Ross, *Chinese Security Policy*, 198
- 6 Ross, *Chinese Security Policy*, 19
- 7 *Encyclopedia of U.S. Foreign Relations*, 1st ed., s.v. “China”
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Qingguo Jia, “Frustrations and Hopes: Chinese Perceptions of the Engagement Policy Debate in the United States,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 10, (2001): 322
- 12 Ross, *Chinese Security Policy*, 133
- 13 Reuters India, “China Low Key Ahead of Taiwan Leader's U.S. Trip,” May 21, 2009, <http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-39780820090521>
- 14 Andrei Davydov, “China in U.S. Contemporary Foreign Policy Strategy,” *Far Eastern Affairs* 33, No. 3, (2005):
- 15 Chi Wang, *George W. Bush and China* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 54
- 16 Davydov, “China in U.S. Contemporary Foreign Policy Strategy,”
- 17 Wang, *George W. Bush and China*, 11
- 18 *Ibid.*, 12
- 19 *Ibid.*, 19
- 20 Suisheng Zhao, *The Transformation of U.S.-China Relations*, ed. Suisheng Zhao (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 19.
- 21 Wang, *George W. Bush and China*, 63
- 22 Suisheng Zhao, *The Transformation of U.S.-China Relations*, 19
- 23 David M. Lampton, *Same Bed, Different Dreams: Managing U.S.-China Relations, 1989-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 9
- 24 Wang, *George W. Bush and China*, 63
- 25 Robert M. Hathaway, *U.S. Domestic Politics and the China Policy Rollercoaster*, ed. Suisheng Zhao (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 61.
- 26 Hathaway, *U.S. Domestic Politics*, 61.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 *Ibid.*, 65.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 Frank Langdon, “American Northeast Asian Strategy,” *Pacific Affairs* 74, no. 2 (2001): 175
- 31 Ross, *Chinese Security Policy*, 133
- 32 Langdon, “American Northeast Asian Strategy,” 177
- 33 to the best of the author's knowledge
- 34 Wan, “Human Rights and Sino-US Relations,” 23
- 35 \$800 million
- 36 Langdon, “American Northeast Asian Strategy,” 175
- 37 Helene Cooper, Michael Wines, David E. Sanger, “China's Role As Lender Alters Obama's Visit,” *New York Times*, November 15, 2009
- 38 Robert Kagan and Dan Blumenthal, “Strategic Reassurance: That Isn't” *The Washington Post*, November 10, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/09/AR2009110902793.html>
- 39 Wang, *George W. Bush and China*, 63

## Works Cited

- Blumenthal, Dan; Kagan, Robert, “Strategic Reassurance That Isn't” The Washington Post, November 10, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/09/AR2009110902793.html>.*
- Cooper, Helene; Sanger, David E.; Wines, Michael, “China's Role As Lender Alters Obama's Visit,” New York Times, November 15, 2009.*
- Davydov, Andrei “China in U.S. Contemporary Foreign Policy Strategy,” Far Eastern Affairs 33, No. 3, (2005): 3-21*
- Encyclopedia of U.S. Foreign Relations, 1st ed., s.v. “China.”*
- Hathaway, Robert M., U.S. Domestic Politics and the China Policy Rollercoaster, ed. Suisheng Zhao (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 61-80.*
- Jia, Qingguo “Frustrations and Hopes: Chinese Perceptions of the Engagement Policy Debate in the United States,” Journal of Contemporary China 10, (2001): 321-330.*
- Lampton, David M., Same Bed, Different Dreams: Managing U.S.-China Relations, 1989-2000 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001)*
- Langdon, Frank, “American Northeast Asian Strategy” Pacific Affairs 74, no. 2 (2001)*
- Rachman, Gideon, “Will China Really Overtake America?,” The Financial Times, June 11, 2007.*
- Reuters India, “China Low Key Ahead of Taiwan Leader's U.S. Trip,” May 21, 2009, <http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-39780820090521>*
- Ross, Robert S., Chinese Security Policy: Structure, Power and Politics (New York: Routledge, 2009).*
- Segal, Gerald, “Does China Matter?,” Foreign Affairs 78, no. 5 (1999)*
- Wan, Ming, “Human Rights and Sino-US Relations: Policies and Changing Realities,” The Pacific Review 10, No. 2 (1997)*
- Wang, Chi, George W. Bush and China (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009)*
- Zhao, Suisheng, The Transformation of U.S.-China Relations, ed. Suisheng Zhao (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 19.*

Photos courtesy of:

“Zeminhandshake.JPG.” Wikimedia Commons. Web. 14 Nov. 2010. <<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zeminhandshake.JPG>>.

“All Sizes | 2009 Five Presidents George W. Bush, President Elect Barack Obama, Former Presidents George H W Bush, Bill Clinton, Jimmy Carter Portrait | Flickr - Photo Sharing!” Welcome to Flickr - Photo Sharing. Web. 14 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/walkadog/3203364850/sizes/o/in/photostream/>>.